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KATHERINE AND HER SISTERS.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"THE DISCIPLINE OF LIFE,"

"THE TWO BROTHERS,"

&c., &c.

La Carità è paziente
E Benefica,
Non cerca il proprio interesse,
Non si muove ad ira,
Non pensa male.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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KATHERINE AND HER SISTERS.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Though old and wise,
Yet still advise.

"PRAY, Katherine," said Mr. Dacre, who was standing at his door, when Katherine, some minutes after Nigel's departure, returned to the drawing-room, "does Grey intend to fasten himself upon us for luncheon in future?"

Since the intrusion of Nigel on his

premises at an unwonted hour had become known to him, this was the thought that had fastened its fangs upon him, and so singular was the nature of the man, that reassurance on this point softened the blow which Katherine seized the opportunity to inflict.

It was only, however, a softening for the moment; for when he considered all the consequences of what had occurred, when he reflected that the daughter of whom he supposed he was to be satisfactorily rid, was again upon his hands, his indignation rose to its proper height, and he poured out on Katherine's head a moderate, or rather immoderate, share of abuse for the whims and crotchets and mysteries which, as he declared, were the cause of all the troubles in the family.

Among the many unjust accusations, Katherine's conscience became painfully alive to the truth of one. She felt that her dislike to the adventure at Sidmouth, her prejudice against the whole affair, had made her shroud it in a mystery, which now proved to have been unwise. Without proclaiming an engagement, which was no engagement, it need not, among the intimate friends of her family, have been so impenetrably veiled. She had made a mistake, as she was too often conscious of doing, and very frankly and regretfully she acknowledged it to Mr. Dacre.

The frank confession was far from pacifying him. Happy in having the sure ground of Katherine's own judgment to sanction his charge of folly, he taunted

her with it in every variety of phrase, and, comforted by so just a discharge of wrath, returned to his solitude to consider what steps had best be taken to lure Nigel back again.

In his perplexity, he bethought himself of Mr. Hope, and set off to Brackleigh.

Short as had been Mr. Hope's sojourn in the neighbourhood, he had already, as by common consent, become the confidant and adviser of all. Whether it were that, appearing to be rather a spectator of than a partaker in the drama of life, a fair hearing and impartial judgment were expected; or that, from the law of charity, which so evidently governed his words and actions, assurance of sympathy was felt; or whether from both causes, and many others joined together, he was

consulted on all occasions of difficulty, great and small, and to him Mr. Dacre now poured out his griefs.

He heard him with strong interest; and though, to him, he only calmly promised that he would do "all in his power to reunite two foolish and misguided young people," the circumstances took possession of his mind; and having dispatched a note requesting Nigel to call upon him, he walked on the terrace, with agitated steps, during the hours that elapsed before he came.

Nigel, meanwhile, had sped homewards, and with such hasty, trampling steps, that thought itself was trampled on. Janet, with a flushed cheek, was watching for him at the dining-room window, and her looks of interest and sympathy invited

him towards her. He entered the dining-room, scarcely aware, from his hasty, breathless walk, of the agitated state of his mind; and when, as he entered, he said, "It is all over, Janet, and I am going," he surprised himself no less than her, by bursting into tears.

Nigel in tears! a sight she never had expected to see; and this proof of Anne's power gave such a pang to her breast, that she remained for a few moments speechless.

Nigel, aghast at his weakness, turned from her with a stamp of passion; but the passion did not master feeling. He was still standing, with quivering lips, struggling with himself, when Janet softly said, "My dear Nigel, I am so sorry for you."

At the first word of pity he was calm; and turning towards her, he replied, "There is nothing to be sorry for, Janet. Of course it is painful, at the moment, to be disenchanted, and to have one's bright hopes overturned; but I am thankful, very thankful, that it has happened before it was too late. To be disenchanted after marriage—*that* would have been the thing to be sorry for."

"And it is really all over, Nigel? Do you really mean over?"

"Most certainly," he replied. "I have been deceived; and deception is that thing which cannot be forgiven; which man at least cannot forgive."

"But, Nigel, is it possible that you can give her up—you who loved her so much?" There was bewilderment in Janet's mind.

"If I had not loved her so much, I suppose I could pardon. *You* know how I loved, how I adored her—almost as an angel on earth; but you cannot know how I told her every thought of my heart, every . . . and yet she deceived me. That man—that lover—it was as you suspected, Janet—that lover," and he gnashed his teeth, "*was* a lover of hers, and more than a lover. Katherine means to tell the whole story, so you will hear; I cannot tell it. But it is past pardon."

He threw himself moodily into a chair. Janet sat down opposite and watched him. When his face in some degree calmed and relaxed, she said, "I am very sorry for *you*, Nigel, as I said before, but I agree with you, it is best it happened now, and

it you ask me if I am sorry for the thing, I am not."

"I don't want you to be sorry," he said, shortly.

"Perhaps not; but it is painful to me not to be able to be sorry, when I see you unhappy, but I cannot be so. I am not sorry—I am *glad*."

"Glad, Janet?" he asked, arrested by the strong emphasis of her words.

She silently nodded. "I suppose you mean that you have been more right about Anne than I was?" And he sighed.

"Not glad to be right," she said, softly and kindly, "but only glad because I thought you were thrown away on Anne." She paused, and saw that her words pleased; then went on, "I believe Anne Dacre to be an amiable, innocent girl; I

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have never doubted that she was so, and I don't doubt it now; but I think she is weak and foolish, without strong feeling, or strong mind, or strong principle. A very good wife for an elderly man; for Mr. Hope, for instance, who would pet and guard her; or for a silly young one, who would care for nothing but a soft voice and beauty; but for you, Nigel, she never was fit. You want a wife who can enter into your schemes, stimulate your ambition, walk with you, and animate you in your upward life." Her colour rose, and her eyes sparkled as she spoke, and Nigel watched her with a kind of fascinated gaze. "That is the sort of wife I wish you to have, and therefore I am glad, even though you are unhappy now."

Nigel did not speak when she ceased, but sat, for some time longer, immersed in thought. When he did speak, the influence of her words was apparent. "Thank you, Janet. I ought not to quarrel with you because you shewed more discernment of character than I did, and I do not. I don't think I could bear this from anyone but you, but from you I not only don't mind, but I tell you, you have done me good. I won't say I don't feel the pain, the agony, of having been deceived in my first dream of happiness; but *thus* I throw it off," and he rose from his seat, and stretched his arms, and in the action seemed to recover his elasticity. "Now to business. I must write to Mr. Dacre, and to my mother, and to her ;

and it may as well be done at once. You may go, Janet. You may tell Mrs. Frankland, in confidence, if you please, that there is something wrong; but what I say to you, you know is only to you; and remember that the Dacres are to break off the marriage, not I."

"The Dacres, Nigel! Why?"

"Because a man, however angry, should never cease to act like a gentleman," he said, proudly.

Janet did not look pleased, but as Nigel sat down to write, she asked no more.

Nigel's letter to Mr. Dacre was short and quickly written. He said Katherine would explain to him all that had occurred, and he hoped he would not blame him for the resolution he had taken. He then made much of leaving the arrange-

ment of the rupture in his hands, and, with some short yet heartfelt expressions of regret, concluded.

His letter to his mother was still shorter, merely informing her of the fact, and saying he would come to Tenby for a few hours to explain the case to her; but when he took the paper to address Anne, he sat over it for so long, that but a few words were written when Mr. Hope's note was put into his hand. Glad to postpone his disagreeable duty, he tore his letter in pieces, and set off for Brackleigh.

An instinctive feeling told him that Mr. Hope would disapprove of his conduct, and all the way as he walked along, in that insane manner in which, in times of excitement, we repeat over and over to ourselves what we know full well, he

made to himself a narrative of all that had occurred, on every fresh repetition aggravating *his* causes of complaint, and arraying in brighter colours his own just conduct.

He was spared, however, the narrative so skilfully prepared, for Mr. Hope's first words were, "Mr. Dacre has been with me, Nigel, you may guess for what purpose."

"Has he been to tell you that my marriage is broken off?" Nigel asked, with a heightened colour.

"Even so."

"And did he also tell you why?"

"As far as he understood the case, I suppose he did. He told me that you had discovered a prior attachment, which his daughter had never had courage to confess to you."

"Yes," Nigel said, "these are the facts ; but the facts calmly stated are vastly different to the facts felt in one's heart. Your lips can say the words coldly, but in my heart they have burned like fire."

"True," Mr. Hope said, kindly ; "but, even coldly stated, the facts are grating to one's ear. I can well imagine what you feel ; and I know that were I a young man, and in your place, not only my feelings, but my conduct too, would have been like yours."

"Thanks, thanks," Nigel said, warmly. "I care little what others think, for in these matters every man has his own sentiments, into which no other man can enter ; but, though I care little for blame, I am thankful for approbation, and yours, I confess, I did not expect."

"I was not speaking of approbation," replied Mr. Hope, "I was speaking of natural feeling, and conduct guided by feeling. Unfortunately, our feelings do not always guide us in the way our better judgment can approve."

"Then you do not approve? Well, I can bear it. I have my own feelings, and with them no stranger may meddle."

"No stranger; but may not a friend, not meddle, but advise?"

"Certainly. I hope I am always ready to listen to advice. What would you have me do?"

"Do you ask me what?" Mr. Hope said, with a kind of pathos in his voice. "I would have you excuse and pardon the errors of youth and weakness; I would have you take her back to your heart, and

pity, and cherish her ; and, with your stronger arms, protect and guide her, all her life long."

"A Quixotic task," Nigel said, scornfully ; and I am no Quixote, nor profess to be. It may be the mission of some ; it is not mine. I can forgive errors, perhaps ; but I cannot cherish the erring."

"What do you intend to do?" Mr. Hope asked, after a pause, in another tone.

"To give her up," Nigel said, decidedly. "In fact, it is already done. The engagement is at an end."

"And have you thought on what you do? Have you thought of all to which you expose her—the jests, the gossip, the slanders, perhaps even the poisoning of her fair fame? Have you thought of all this, in connection with one who

once, who a few hours ago, was dear to you."

"I have," he said, loftily. "I have considered and provided for all. I have placed myself in their hands, to deal with in the matter as they please. If there any jests, they will be on me; so be it. I can bear them."

"A man can well bear them; a woman cannot. You speak like an infant, Nigel. If the truth is told, what will be thought? Will it be believed that the simple discovery of a prior attachment—an attachment of a year or so ago to a man now married—has made you act as you do. The world is not so kind, nor so credulous."

"Nor am I so chivalrous as to sacrifice my life's happiness to one who has deceived me; who, but for circumstances . . ."

He gave a stamp with his foot, and then only added, "Words are useless, Mr. Hope. I know what I feel, and I am resolved."

But in the stamp of the foot, Mr. Hope read so much of living, jealous love, that he would not believe in the uselessness of words, and poured his out with an earnestness it was hard to withstand.

Minds are very differently affected by advice. Some are impenetrable to it, and, though the counsellor cannot believe the fact, they are not advised with impunity. Since they are not swayed in the least degree, they are hardened. This was Nigel's case; he was so convinced of the perfections of his moral and intellectual nature, that the very fact of advice being

offered was offensive to him. It seemed to cast a shade of doubt on his perfections ; and for every word of advice and warning spoken by Mr. Hope he repaid himself by a reflection on his justice within.

Even when catching his arm, and speaking in tones of broken and passionate agitation, Mr. Hope cried, "Do you know what you are preparing for yourself? Do you consider all the consequences of the step you take? Look at me. Do you think it is time alone that has made my hair like snow? I tell you it was remorse ; remorse for an act of mad passion, done in youth, and never, never to be undone." Nigel was only moved for a moment. His resolution was taken.

For a moment, he was moved. The

piercing tone of warning did stab his heart ; but, in the very same instant, some breath of memory brought before him Janet's words, "weak and foolish, without strong feeling, strong mind, or strong principle ;" and these words conquered the relenting impulse. It was put aside, with a momentary sigh, and then he calmly replied :

"You quite mistake me, Mr. Hope. I am not acting in mad passion. I have deliberated, and, as you know, argued. I have faced every consequence, and, in coolness, made up my mind. When respect and love are gone, when trust can be reposed no more, happiness is impossible. I know I am acting as is best for the future, and no fears, nor pity in the present, shall move me."

"I have done," Mr. Hope said, letting go his arm, and composing with a strong effort his own agitated countenance. "Let us say no more."

And no more was said. Nigel returned home in a different mood of mind to that in which he had set out. Having resisted Mr. Hope's appeal, his pride was now involved in maintaining his opinion ; and if pangs of sorrow and self-reproach visited him, to that pride they were immolated.

On his return, he wrote his letter to Anne, and it was a colder and crueller one than the first would have been ; he reproached her more, and spoke more of his loss of trust, and dwelt far less on the agony of parting from her.

When this was done, he became

impatient to be gone, and resolved to go for a short distance on his journey that night. While he went to make preparations, he desired Janet to tell Mrs. Frankland of his departure, and since Mr. Hope knew it, the general outline of the story; and when all was ready he went to wish her good-bye.

"My dear Nigel," she said, kindly, holding his hand, "I am grieved, from my heart, at all I have heard; but, before the inevitable step is taken, will you let me say a few words of counsel; the counsel of a calm old woman, who has outlived the fiery passions of youth?"

"I will not be so ungracious as to say I will not listen, Mrs. Frankland, but I tell you beforehand that my

determination is immovably fixed ; a determination not made in fiery passion, but in cool deliberation."

"Then I will not waste my words," she replied. "Good-bye, and God bless you. May you never regret the step you so hastily take."

Janet followed him to the door, to see him off. "What shall you do? and where shall you go?" she asked.

"I don't know. You shall hear from me." He shook hands with her, and jumped into the little countrified conveyance, which was to take him about seven miles on his road. When seated in it, he suddenly jumped out again. "Write to me very often, Janet," he said, again shaking hands with her. "I shall only write to you; I shall have no other correspondent.

From you I shall expect to hear *everything* that happens. *I depend upon you.*"

"I will write ; you may depend on me," she said ; and he again jumped in, and drove away.

At the close of this day at Sandlands—a miserable day, that had been made more miserable by Mr. Dacre's excusable, perhaps, but unprecedented ill-humour—Rose caught hold of Katherine's hand, arresting her, while giving her last comfortable touches to her bed. "My dear Katherine," she said, in a voice of softness, very unusual to her, "I am so sorry for you."

"For me, Rose?" Katherine said, surprised and scarcely knowing to what she might allude.

"Yes, for you. I had hoped your

cares were nearly over. It seems as if they were never to end."

"And do you think I wish them to end?" she asked, still surprised at Rose's tone and manner.

"I don't know what you wish, but I know that I wish them to end. It is time for you to have new cares; and much more it is time for you to have somebody to care for *you*."

"My dear Rose! what or who has put this into your head?"

"Do you think I have no thoughts of my own?" she replied, smiling, "I say what I think. In the books I read, I see that marriage is spoken of as *the* happy thing; and I want you to be thinking about it, Katherine, before it is too late."

"There is plenty of time," Katherine

replied, lightly. "I am not so dreadfully old yet." Then feeling that that light tone was unworthy of her young sister's kindness, she said, with serious feeling, "I should be sorry if you looked, dear Rose, and still more sorry if you thought I looked, on life in any such way as you say your books describe. I dare say marriage is a very happy state, but so are many other states of life, and none happier than to care and be cared for by sisters like mine."

"I don't want to argue," Rose said, after a moment's silence, "I said what I did, because I could not help it. Good night, Katherine. But, before you go away, just tell me if Annie is asleep yet."

Katherine went, and came back shaking her head. "No. Her eyes are shut, but

her cheeks are streaming with tears, and she has got Nigel's letter on her pillow."

"Poor Annie! I am afraid she will feel it dreadfully," Rose said, and sighed. "She was too fond of Nigel, and so I often told her."

"I had a hope, till now, that in time it might come right," Katherine said, with another sigh; "but since this cruel letter came, I hardly think I wish it."

"I think Nigel has a right to be angry," Rose remarked. "I know if I had been a man, such a thing would have made me very ferocious. I feel for him, I must say."

"Angry, yes," replied Katherine, "but not cruel. I think a man must have a hard heart who can be cruel to Annie. With you or me it would have been different.

If *we* had behaved in this way, it would have been a wilful, bad act ; but no one can live a week with Annie without seeing that she is without guile. She has no faults but her weakness, and the cowardice it brings ; and though Nigel may be disappointed at finding faults when he thought her perfect, a strong man ought to know how to pity."

With a "good-night" to Rose, Katherine left her, and went to take her seat by her other sister's bed. Anne's utter prostration of strength, mental and bodily, caused her some uneasiness, and she remained watching her till a late hour of the night. As she sat by her side, in silence and darkness, Rose's words haunted her fancy, and when she stole to bed, her heart was agitated. The agitation disordered her imagination

and infected her dreams, and once she awoke in a strange nightmare. She thought Trevethlan was dragging her, in spite of her own and her sisters' resistance, to the altar ; but, on the way, Nigel met them, and tore their hands apart, saying, "I forbid the banns."

In explanation of the definite form of this dream, it may be mentioned, that, a few days previous, one of those silent and nameless, yet speaking tokens of a distant watchful affection had arrived, this time more speaking than usual, since it came in the form of a gold pin, shaped like an anchor ; and the sight had fluttered the unselfish yet by no means passionless heart of her to whom the meaning symbol was addressed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The worthy Rector thought it meet
Some moral truth, as preface, to repeat ;
Reflection serious, common-place, 'tis true ;
But he would act as he was wont to do,
And bring his morals in his neighbour's view.

CRABBE.

"It is no use defending him, Betsey. I believe you would say a soft word for the Devil, if you dared. I say he is a self-willed young fellow, and with all his show of fine principles, has no better guide for his actions than his own passions. He is, he is, a . . . jackanapes."

Mr. Frankland was standing near the door of the drawing-room, and into his wife's private ear was pouring out his wrath against Nigel, one morning, about two months after the date of the events lately recorded. He was so near the door, and so unconscious of anything but his wrath, that he did not hear the tap by which Mr. Hope gave notice of his entrance, and was almost overset by the sudden opening. The surprise did not tend to calm his temper, and, in reply to Mr. Hope's pardon begged, and "good morning," he said, "Oh, you may hear me and welcome. I said he was a selfish young jackanapes, and so I would say at St. Paul's Churchyard. I knew I had no patience with his airs and his platitudes; and now I know I was right. *I* was right who said he was a

humbug, and *she* was wrong who thought him a saint upon earth."

"What is the matter?" asked Mr. Hope, in his quiet manner.

"The matter is that"—nodding to a letter that lay on the table. "It is not enough that by his fantastic folly he destroys the peace and undermines the health of that sweet young Anne Dacre; but now he treats his father and mother to the same airs. He's a humbug, and I always knew it."

"What is the matter?" repeated Mr. Hope, turning to Mrs. Frankland.

"Nigel refuses to come back," she explained. "That letter is from Mrs. Grey, who tells us so. She is disappointed, and his father is angry; and not, I own, without just cause. They wrote, on Mr. Dela-

mere's death, to point out the importance of his presence, and to desire him to return immediately; and he declines—professes entire indifference to Parliament, and intends to improve his mind by travel. In fact, he throws away for good every prospect of advancement; for, as Mrs. Grey says, it is useless to attempt a canvass without him; and such a good chance can hardly occur again."

"Yes, yes, those are the facts," said Mr. Frankland. "He is going to 'enlarge his mind!' Pah!" And he contorted his countenance into an expression of sickening disgust. "And yet," he added, after a moment, "*she* defends him," nodding to his wife.

"I only said," she said, in her gentle voice, "that disappointment must be prey-

ing on his mind; or he never could throw away, in this insane manner, that which has been the dream of his life."

"It is possible," Mr. Hope said, thoughtfully."

"Pah!" said Mr. Frankland.

The particulars of Nigel's conduct were as follows:—On reaching Tenby, to explain to his mother the cause of the breaking off of the marriage, he found her informed of most of the facts of his tale, and from the lips of Norman Montague himself. This latter, angry and uneasy at the discovery of what his wife had done, had, on hearing the confession from her own lips, called on Mrs. Grey to explain the case, and to express a hope that the letter might not have been forwarded. When he found that not only it had been for-

warded, but that the answer to the letter was the few lines stating the termination of the engagement, he appeared much agitated ; and, in his agitation, related to Mrs. Grey the history of his connection with Anne Dacre. With frankness and generosity, as regarded himself, yet with a want of what must be called “delicacy”—a want which appeared to be a part of his character—towards his wife, he suggested that the fortune of Miss Pennington, and her evident willingness to bestow it on him, had been the cause of his behaviour to Anne ; and he spoke in strong terms of the many hours of remorse and misery which it had brought upon him. He further said, that it was not until some months after his marriage that his wife had discovered his previous engagement ;

that Anne's letter to him, which he had prized too much to destroy, had been the cause of the discovery, and that her jealousy had been much excited at the time, and continually kept alive, by his refusing to part with the letter. He added, that, not many days before, a "fracas" on the subject had taken place, and that he had then promised either to destroy the letter or to restore it to Anne; that, preferring the latter alternative, he had sealed it up and directed it, intending to seize some opportunity to perform his promise discreetly, but had certainly not intended to have it conveyed in such a manner, or at such a time.

All this was repeated to Nigel by his mother, and the agitation and regret of Mr. Montague were mentioned without reserve. But the effects on his mind,

and naturally so, were far different to those she had anticipated. She had intended to soothe him, and exculpate Anne; and, instead of soothing, she added fuel to his rage. Unaccustomed to the analysis of human passions, she took no thought for the madness of jealousy; nay, jealousy, being a sensation she had never felt, was beyond the comprehension of her sane and matter-of-fact mind. She saw that her words irritated, but she thought her dear son excessively silly, and did not sufficiently weigh them before they were spoken.

The idea that Anne not only had had a lover, but that at this present moment he dared to love her—for so Nigel interpreted his agitation—actually made him mad, and he left Tenby to divert his mind in travelling through the lovely

solitudes of some of the Welch mountains. The experiment did not succeed; by dwelling upon his grievances in solitude, they grew as high as the mountains he gazed upon, and he returned to Tenby only to bid his mother farewell, and to inform her that he intended to travel.

Though annoyed at his departure at this critical time, so much of uncertainty still hanging over his future prospects, Mr. Grey, seeing the disturbed state of his son's mind, thought it best to give the permission desired. It was given for a few weeks' absence, and, at the same time Nigel was kindly furnished with ample means to amuse himself. A month after his departure, Mr. Delamere died suddenly. Mr. Grey wrote to Vienna, where he believed Nigel to be, and desired

his instant return ; but he had left Vienna, and was gone to Athens ; and from Athens he wrote a determined refusal to return ; saying he now cared nothing for Parliament ; his present inclination was to improve himself for a year or two by travelling in the East. He was uncertain, he said, where he next should bend his steps, but desired that his letters might be sent to Constantinople ; and having taken this precaution to have his own way, he wandered about where his fancy led him. But foreign travel, though it might be enlarging and improving to his mind, was by no means improving to his temper. The growing sense of having been wilfully ill-used—a growing because an indulged fancy—made his proud heart throb and smart ; and under the smarting

he felt humbled. More proudly, therefore, and wilfully, he determined to shew to all, his indifference to England, and to all that England contained.

Mr. Hope was still talking over the conduct of Nigel, and "the pity of it," with Mr. and Mrs. Frankland, when Janet looked into the room, in her walking-dress.

"Where are you going?" asked Mr. Frankland, fretfully. "When I asked you to walk this morning, you said you had not time, and you seem to have time enough now."

"I wanted to write a long letter to Nigel," Janet said, in a soft explanatory manner. "That was why I could not go."

"And where are you going in this haste?"

"I am going to see how Anne Dacre is, before I seal my letter. I heard yesterday, from Mr. Tyler, that she was very unwell, and her cough very bad; and I thought it would be more satisfactory to go and see for myself."

"Yes, my love, do go," said Mr. Frankland. "Your uncle heard this morning that she is better to-day, but I shall be glad to hear more particularly; and see if there is *anything* we have that she could fancy."

"Which way shall you go, Miss Grey?" asked Mr. Hope.

"Across the fields. This frosty morning, they will be quite dry."

"I shall overtake you then, if you will

allow me; for I am going to Sandlands, also." And before she was half way, he caught her up, and walked with her.

"Do you often visit Miss Anne Dacre?" he enquired.

"Not very often; only when I am going to write to Nigel."

"Is he then interested in hearing about her? Do you think he repents of what he has done?"

"I don't know," was Janet's reply. "He makes no remarks, and asks no questions, in the few letters I have had from him; but, before he went away, he told me to write him word of *everything* that passed."

"You are very obedient," Mr. Hope said, smiling; "more obedient than, behaving as he has done, I should be inclined to be."

"I don't blame Nigel as much as you and Uncle Frankland do," Janet said, frankly. "I suppose my mind is formed like his, for I feel that I, too, should be unforgiving."

"Whatever may be said for his first anger," Mr. Hope said, quickly, "and perhaps that was excusable, I cannot forgive him now. When he knows, as you own he does, that her health is failing, his absence his unpardonable."

"You must remember that it is only of late that Anne has been so very ill ; and Nigel's movements are so uncertain, that most probably my last letters have never been received."

"What is his direction now ?" asked Mr. Hope.

"Constantinople," she replied, but there

was a slight flush on her cheek as she spoke, and she almost immediately went on. "I find it hard to forgive Anne Dacre as it is. Did my aunt tell you of Mrs. Grey's letter, this morning? Nigel is sacrificing the hope of his life; the dream of years; that which we all have built on as the proper field for his talents, and she is the cause."

"I understand your feeling of disappointment," Mr. Hope said, kindly. "Poor girl, I fear she will feel it too."

"Yes," Janet said, "and to feel oneself the cause, must be worse than all."

They walked on in silence, till they came in sight of Sandlands. It was still at a distance; the house just appearing among some fine trees, with smooth green meadows, and the rough ground of some

sand-pits making a picturesque foreground. There was nothing fine, and no actual beauty, but the trellised front, and the fall of the ground, and shape of the trees, had a snug, tranquil, inviting appearance.

"Whenever I see that view I moralise," said Mr. Hope. "The view might be described as 'the Picture of Comfort,' and yet how little of *comfort* there is in that house; and how much of trial. Small trials perhaps compared with the great troubles of this vast troublesome world, but yet such trial as frets the heart and spirits almost more than greater ones."

"Yes," Janet replied, kindly. "I am sometimes very sorry for Katherine."

"And yet I believe we are sorry for her without sufficient cause," Mr. Hope

said, again. "Sometimes, when Mr. Dacre's unreasonableness has made even my old blood boil up, I have seen her as cheerful as if nothing had occurred to annoy her. Whether it is from nature, or from strong religious principle, as I rather imagine most probable, she certainly appears so to have learned to love her duty, that, even under those fretting cares I spoke of, she is happy."

His voice had a warmer tone than usual, and Janet stole a stealthy glance at his face. After a moment, she said, "You may be right about Katherine liking to do her duty, but that she is happy I very much doubt. I think she has had wishes, as others have."

"How do you mean?" he said, with some quickness.

"That she should have had wishes does not make her less admirable, does it? I think, on the contrary, it makes her more so. When I say wishes, I believe her to have had the common feelings of youth, that is all."

Mr. Hope did not immediately answer; when he did he said, "I don't quite understand what you mean. Perhaps you don't intend that I should understand. If so, tell me at once, and I will ask no questions. I know I have no right to be inquisitive."

"I assure you, Mr. Hope, Katherine has entrusted no secrets to me; if she had, I hope I should not have even so far betrayed them. What I say, I say from my own observation; and if you *are* curious, there is no possible reason why I should not tell you what I guess."

She stopped, provokingly, and he again hesitated before he said, "You speak so darkly, Miss Grey, that you force me to be inquisitive. I will not, therefore, pretend to be otherwise. I am curious, I own frankly, to know what you mean. Will you gratify my curiosity?"

"I only mean," she said, lightly, "that I believe Katherine to have had that very interesting thing—a lover ; and I fancy she liked him, but gave him up that she might remain with her sisters."

"Indeed," he said, "I never even heard a rumour of this."

"You were not likely to do that," was Janet's reply, "for no one, I believe, observed what was going on except myself. Don't you know that when general opinion settles a person's destiny, it is a very hard

thing to unsettle it. Katherine has always been doomed to remain with her sisters, and so I believe she might actually marry before our eyes, before we should any of us be aware of the fact. This is the only way in which I can explain the blindness of the neighbourhood to what once went on."

"This took place—these occurrences you speak of—took place many years ago, I suppose?"

"At the time the Brandons had Brackleigh. A young man who visited there—his name was Mr. Trevethlan—took a great fancy to Katherine. What happened I don't know. I only tell what I imagine to have taken place: that he wished to marry her, and that she liked him, but gave up the marriage for her sisters' sake."

"I quite agree with you," he said, calmly.
'It makes her conduct the more admirable."

"What I have said, Mr. Hope," Janet added, after an instant, "I have said only to you. I have never even told Aunt Eliza what I suspected. I am sorry I have told you, for I often observe how stories grow out of a chance observation, and how much mischief a single word will do."

"You need have no fear with me," he replied. "I am safe."

"Yes, I knew that well," she said, laughing. "You are very close."

He made no answer to this observation, and nothing more was said till they entered the gate of Sandlands. "Miss Anne Dacre is confined to her room, I believe," he then observed. "Shall you go up to her?"

“Oh! no. I always visit Rose. She is my favourite, and she will tell me all I want to know about Anne.”

“I want to persuade Mr. Dacre to have more advice,” Mr. Hope said. “That is my object to-day; but I will go first into the drawing-room with you.”

The three sisters were there. Katherine at a distant window, writing. Rose, on a sofa, by the fire, and Anne, near her, lying back in an arm-chair, with her feet on a stool. After a confinement, of about ten days, to her room for a violent cough, she had been allowed, and for the benefit of her spirits even encouraged, to come down; but she looked very unfit to be there. She seemed as one wasted by long illness, so sharp her features and so deadly white her skin; and when the visitors spoke to

her, one of those over-brilliant flushes, which mark failing health, flitted over her transparent cheeks.

Mr. Hope crossed the room to Katherine, while Janet sat down with the invalids.

"She is better, I hope?" he asked, with a movement towards Anne; enabled to speak with freedom, by the gay conversation Rose kept up.

"Yes, better, certainly; her cough much better; but do you know that Mr. Tyler says if she catches cold again we must move? He is very anxious about her, I am afraid."

"I am glad he has spoken on the subject. I knew he wished to do it, but was afraid Mr. Dacre would not be pleased."

"He is not," Katherine replied, with a look of care and anxiety; "in fact, he

refuses, at present, to hear of such a thing; but I will not worry myself. If Mr. Tyler says it is absolutely necessary, I am sure he will consent."

"No doubt," Mr. Hope said, cheerfully, then glancing round to see that all were talking, he said, "Do you ever mention Nigel to her?"

"Sometimes I do. She does not invite the subject, but I am sure anything is better than brooding; better for everybody, but especially for her. I tell her what I hear of him."

"Do you know that he is behaving very madly, and wilfully?" And Mr. Hope repeated to her the purport of Mrs. Grey's letter.

"Poor Nigel!" Katherine said, very earnestly, "I am very sorry."

"You are charitable, Miss Dacre," Mr. Hope said, smiling. "I did not expect you to feel for *him*."

"No, I am not over charitable towards him," Katherine said, smiling too; "but I am sorry for him now. When I remember how he spoke of this, and dreamed of this, I am sure he cannot be in his sane mind when he casts his chance away. Is it not a wonderful thing to see so much misery permitted to arise from so much folly. Folly on both sides; poor Anne's even more than his, though I hardly like to say so now." And she glanced an anxious glance at her pale sister.

"Shall you tell her? Will it give her pain, do you think?"

"It must. She will naturally think

herself the cause; but I shall certainly tell her. The longer I live, the more I feel that much less harm is done by openly telling, even unpleasant things, than by, however kindly, suppressing them. It is bad enough to have to conceal, when a thing *must* not be told." And there was a look in her countenance which Mr. Hope interpreted to mean that she had known what concealment was.

"You have many anxieties and troubles," he said, with more than kindness.

"I feel now that if Anne does but improve, I shall care for nothing," tears springing into her eyes, as she spoke; "It breaks my heart to see her as she is." The breaking off of Anne's engagement

had caused little talk in the neighbourhood. By Mr. Hope's advice nothing had been said as to the cause. It was broken off, that was generally known, and the fact received its usual share of attention; but Mr. Dacre's character was too well understood to make surmises necessary. He bore the blame. He was supposed to have been so unmanageable about settlements that Mr. Grey could not, in fairness, consent to them; and so little doubt was felt that, on seeing the effect of the separation on Anne's health, one or other party would make concessions, that interest died away.

Little, meanwhile, cared Anne for the talk of neighbours, or any other outward thing. Her mind was gathered up into the one feeling of anguish at Nigel's dis-

pleasure, and into the horror of being, by him, supposed to be false.

To be wroth with one we love
Doth work like madness in the brain.

And to have offended one we love, and look up to, as a superior being, to have offended by our own errors, and to see no place for repentance, works with a still keener madness in heart and brain, in body and mind. It has surely some foretaste of "the worm that dieth not." Beneath the tortures of this thought, added to the other "pangs of despised love," Anne's health faded. After the first shock, with docile obedience to Katherine's wish, with unselfish desire to give as little anxiety as possible, she came forth as usual, and attempted to perform her usual occupations, both in the cultivation of

her mind, and in her works of sympathy and charity ; but it would not do. She pined in thought; melancholy fastened on her soul ; and those occupations to which Katherine looked as restoratives, became too much for her. It was on this frame of mind and body that a cough, caught without apparent cause, settled with violence; and, though healthy, Anne was too fragilely made to suffer such a complication of ills with impunity. None could see her without a fear that some deadly poison was at work within.

When Mr. Hope left the drawing-room he proceeded to visit Mr. Dacre in his study, and never before had he so fully realised the selfish and unreasoning nature of the man, or the difficulties with which Katherine had to contend. Anne

was no favourite with her father, and, with some justice, her late misfortune had irritated him ; yet, when health was at stake, Mr. Hope had not expected such unfatherly feelings to have the mastery. So it was however, and, treating the whole subject of the illness with disdain, Mr. Dacre declined to listen to the arguments, for either change of advice or change of scene, which Mr. Hope enforced.

Disappointed at this result, Mr. Hope took his way thoughtfully homewards. Many thoughts occupied him, among which the news he had heard from Janet regarding Katherine, was the most prominent. As he walked along, plunging deeper and deeper into meditation, his cogitations assumed some such form as this :—

“To be their protector? To have the right to protect! Mr. Dacre fears me already; my words have weight, and if *that* could be, he is mercenary enough to buy that advantage by concession to my advice. If *that* could be! How would it be with her? What better thing in life could be offered to her than to be thus? Not taken from her charge, her sacred charge, but placed beside them for ever, with one to share her cares, to encourage her in them, to make them, through his protection, less. If she could see it in this light! The experiment shall be made. What I have heard this day, encourages, decides me. What right had I to win an untouched heart? It seemed a sacrilege to attempt it; but if she has known that trial, the

scathing and withering of early affections, surely she will not scorn to be offered a heart even as dead and wasted as mine." He walked on. Janet's words spoken in the simple and unamiable desire to ward off from a hated Dacre a fate that seemed a promising one, had not worked in the manner she anticipated. He walked on, his brows knitting into intenser thought, his purpose becoming more defined; and as the purpose grew more fixed the current of thought changed; the mood became more excitable; the flow of argument less clear. "And shall it be thus? Oh! memory, may I at last repose? I ask but this. No passionate hope, no romance of life for me; no hope, no wish, no prayer but for re-

pose. And is this forbidden? If it be, oh! memory, speak now, ere it be too late; or else for ever hold your peace." The stillness of Mr. Hope's manner was the stillness of art, not nature; and as he walked alone, and touched on the borders of a memory which carried him back to the days of passion, his manners, lost their calmness; his footsteps trod hurriedly, and he tossed his arms in an attitude of impassioned appeal.

He was suddenly aware of a presence, and excitement vanished, and shame took its place, as he found himself close to the Parsonage, and saw Mr. Roper at his garden-gate.

He coloured deeply, conscious of an agitated mood, and unconscious how far it had revealed itself; coloured, as a guilty child, discovered in an act of which it is

ashamed. For a moment, he hardly knew how to meet the gaze of Mr. Roper ; but the next, taking the protecting armour of bold truth, he walked up to him, and said, "I thought I was alone, Mr. Roper ; and, as I fear I sometimes do when alone, I was thinking aloud ; excuse the habit of a solitary."

"Indeed, Mr. Hope," replied Mr. Roper, courteously, "apology is quite needless to me. As I often say to my parishioners, 'Mr. Roper sees nothing ;' they are quite safe with me, so long as the commandments are kept. I have no business with anything else, unless they please."

"Thank you. Then I will say no more. A fine frosty morning!"

"Remarkably fine. But if you are not in a hurry, Mr. Hope, will you step in? To tell you the truth, my wife was going

to write and ask you to call. We wish for your advice on a certain point."

To give advice was now a daily part of Mr. Hope's life, and he followed Mr. Roper into his house, as to an inevitable duty.

Mrs. Roper was seated at a table covered with garments, to be turned into garments for the poor. Having no children of her own, the overflowing kindness of her nature found vent in being a mother of charity to the children of her husband's flock, and she rose up to meet Mr. Hope, with a little shirt in her hand, and knitting needles, occupied on a sock, stuck into her side.

"I wish your shoes may not be wet," she said, as he sat down; not that he wore shoes, or that the stainlessness of his boots

on that frosty morning was not evident ; but the word was the first that presented itself, and the thought the only one that suggested itself, for the purpose of making a kind and neighbourly enquiry.

“Quite dry, thanks,” he answered, as patiently as if the question had been a sensible one ; and, with like patience, while Mr. Roper was searching for something of which he was in want, gave her, for about the hundredth time, some desired information respecting the climate of India.

“Here it is,” Mr. Roper at last exclaimed, and then approached Mr. Hope. “Now, Mr. Hope, will you be so good as to give us your opinion on this letter ? Or, stay. Perhaps it may be desirable that I should first tell you to what it refers. I don’t doubt but that you have remarked, and that

you grieve, as we do, to remark, the sadly failing health of Miss Anne Dacre."

"I do, indeed, grieve to remark it," Mr. Hope, replied, earnestly.

"Poor soul!" sighed Mrs. Roper; and a deluge of small tears overflowed her eyes, in a moment.

"Well, Mr. Hope," continued Mr. Roper, "that is the subject on which I wished to consult you. Now, you must know that it has occurred to me, that the body of man acts upon his mind; I mean to say, exactly the reverse—that the mind of man acts upon his body, and that, if the mind is ill at ease, the body is apt to be a fellow-sufferer."

Mr. Hope, on Mr. Roper pausing for an opinion, gravely assented to this newly-discovered fact in medical science.

"It has, therefore, further occurred to me, that Mr. Grey's return might be of use to Miss Anne. Miss Dacre, I should tell you, has kindly informed us who are her true well-wishers" (here a fresh flood fell from Mrs. Roper's eyes), "and of the cause of the estrangement; and it is in consequence of that knowledge that, with all due delicacy to Miss Anne, I desire to act."

"What have you done?" inquired Mr. Hope, anxiously.

"Nothing is yet done. My wife and I, in talking it over, determined to consult you before we acted; but my letter is written, and only requires your approval. I have simply taken on myself to inform Mr. Grey of Miss Anne's illness; and I have stated, as guardedly and delicately

as was possible, my conviction that his conduct is the cause."

"Of her illness," Mr. Hope replied, "Nigel Grey is fully aware: as fully aware, that is, as he can be at this distance; and of the present sad state of things he will be made aware to-day. Miss Grey corresponds with him, and gives him all necessary information, were he inclined to act on what he knows."

"Indeed! I was not aware that young gentlemen and ladies corresponded on such subjects."

"They are cousins," Mr. Hope said, with a slight smile. "I believe in that relationship it is permissible."

Mr. Roper looked extremely disconcerted; as much as man can be who has

laid a wise plan, and finds another beforehand with him.

The soft voice of his wife relieved him.

"But I don't see, dear, that Miss Grey's letter need interfere with yours ; we don't know what she says, or what she thinks about poor Anne. Young people are very thoughtless, and never expect that anything will happen to anybody."

"That is true," exclaimed Mr. Roper, quickly, and looked eagerly at Mr. Hope for his opinion.

He was thoughtful. "Will you let me see your letter?" he asked, after a moment. "I will tell you my doubt about the matter. If Nigel Grey is the impulsive, self-willed being his present conduct makes me fear he is, are we justified in taking

any steps to put that poor girl under his protection again? There are worse kinds of death, Mr. Roper, than the death of the body; no worse kind than the sufferings a weak and sensitive nature may undergo from a selfish man." He spoke with so much pathos in his voice, that Mrs. Roper's pocket-handkerchief seemed quite insufficient for the office it had to perform.

"Very true, Mr. Hope," said Mr. Roper, shaking his head, "the mind of man, and more especially the female mind, is a tender plant. It needs gentle nurture. Nevertheless—it may perhaps be from sympathy with my wife, who suffers greatly at the sight of poor Miss Anne's decay—I feel unwilling to sit still, without making an effort to relieve her. If, after my plain

and pathetic statement of the case, Mr. Grey should be inexorable, my opinion would coincide with yours; but I am disposed to hope better things. I cannot believe that he is aware—probably, as my wife suggests, Miss Grey herself is not—of the very serious aspect of affairs; and it appears to me that we should not deal fairly by him if we left him misinformed.”

“I believe you are right, Mr. Roper,” replied Mr. Hope. “I gave some very earnest advice to Nigel Grey, and he disregarded it. Perhaps I resented this, and have been disposed to leave him too entirely to reap the fruit of his ways. It only remains for me to read your letter.” And he held out his hand, with a smile, and some inward dread, lest he should have to condemn.

He was, however, agreeably surprised. Mr. Roper had felt strongly while he wrote, and the most commonplace, in such circumstances, express themselves well. There was no want of delicacy towards Anne, nor of tact in dealing with Nigel. He simply said, that having been informed by Miss Dacre of the cause of separation, he could not help thinking that Miss Anne's present state was a sufficient answer to all doubts of the truth of her attachment to him, nor could he but imagine that, were all known to Nigel, he would view the case as he did. Anne's state of health was feelingly dwelt on, and the letter concluded with apologies for offering advice, and an assurance that it was done in a simple desire to inform him of a fact in which he

was much concerned, and without the knowledge of the Dacres.

A cordial approval was given by Mr. Hope when the letter was returned, and Mrs. Roper now shed tears of joy over her husband's sagacity and triumph.

"Do you know the address?" asked Mr. Hope.

"Yes. I casually asked it of Mr. Frankland two days ago for this purpose. To Constantinople! In three weeks, at the latest, he will receive my letter, and he will return, as I anticipate at least, with the speed of a lover! Love, you know, Mr. Hope, is said to have wings."

"I hope he may in this case," Mr. Hope replied. "God prosper your endeavours if

it be for that poor girl's good. That is all I can say."

An hour after this conversation, Janet Grey returned from her walk, and sat down to her unfinished letter. She added this paragraph:—

"I have been this morning to Sandlands. Though you make no remarks on what I say, I still remember your command to tell you everything, and try to obey it. Anne Dacre has had a cold, and a bad one. She caught it about ten days ago, in driving to B——, to shop. She still looks pale, but it is going off. She was in the drawing-room with Rose and Katherine, and we had a great deal of talk. Mr. Hope was also there. Everything looked just as usual. Katherine

absorbed in business, while her younger sisters took their pleasure."

After she had finished her letter, Janet went to the window, and stood there till she saw the little postman, with the bag over his shoulder, go through the gate that led into the road. She then put on her bonnet, and went after him. She went leisurely through the gate, but ran down the lane, and called him, as he proceeded whistling along.

"Why did you go so early, Joe?" she said, sharply, as she overtook him. "I had a letter."

"Please, Miss," he said, with simplicity, touching his hat, "I goes neither early nor late, but in the proper time."

"Well, no matter, since I overtook you,"

and she dropped a letter, directed to Nigel Grey at "Jerusalem," into the slit of the bag.

"I have told the exact truth," she almost unconsciously soliloquized as she walked homewards. "No one can say I have done otherwise."

"But not the whole truth," conscience mildly suggested.

"No, because it would have been bad for him," she replied; and the timid monitor, too often silenced, withdrew into obscurity again.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The wildest ills that darken life
Are raptures to the bosom's strife ;
The tempest in its blackest form
Is beauty to the bosom's storm ;
The ocean lashed to fury loud,
Its high wave mingling with the cloud,
To Anger's dark and stormy sea,
Is peaceful, sweet serenity.

Not many days afterwards a note from Mr. Hope was put into Katherine's hands. It calmly and simply expressed a wish to see her for an hour alone, as he had something to say to her. In a postscript he added, "I must not disappoint you.

What I have to say does not relate to Nigel Grey."

"What can Mr. Hope have to say?" Katherine said, lightly, putting the note into Rose's hand.

Rose concealed her face as she read it, to hide a smile. From her sofa she observed the world, and speculated on the feelings that prompted the words and actions of all who approached. She saw, therefore, what those busied with much business did not see. But wise as an old judge, she thought she might be mistaken, and said not a word.

"I am sorry it is not about Nigel," she observed. "I am always expecting to hear that he is coming back."

"So am I; at least, wishing it, though often against my judgment," Katherine

replied. "I cannot but wish for anything to do good to Annie."

"I think he will come back. I always did, and I still do. Don't you, Katherine?"

"I do sometimes," she replied, despondingly, "but if it is not soon, it may be too late. I wonder if he knows how ill she is."

"He will soon," Rose said, with a smile, "Mr. Roper has written to him."

Katherine's cheek flushed with mingled feelings; pleasure that could not be controlled, dashed with doubt, anxiety, and humiliation at the thought of an appeal to one who had borne himself as proudly as Nigel had. "How do you know, Rose?" she asked, anxiously.

"He confided to me what he had

done yesterday; but you must remember, Katherine, that it was a confidence to *me*, because I suppose he thought I was a safe person. And so I am; no one shall hear of it but you; but, dear Katherine, I can't help telling you, when I see you look so terribly afraid."

"And how soon could he come?"

"I suppose in five or six weeks."

Katherine sighed.

"My dear Katherine, don't sigh," Rose said, affectionately, "Annie is not so bad as you think; now that dreadful cough is going off, she will get stronger."

The door opened as Rose spoke, and the pale spectre of their lovely sister walked slowly in, panting with the exertion of coming down stairs.

Katherine closed her eyes, fearfully;

then flew to her, to help her across the room. But Anne smiled, and declined the help. "I am better to-day, indeed," she said; "you must let me try and get strong again." And she crept across the room, and threw herself into the arm-chair, near Rose's sofa, with the heavy fall of an invalid.

Katherine disappeared. Her hands only could prepare such food as would tempt Anne's failing appetite, and she hastened to her task. As soon as she left the room, Anne said to Rose, "What were you saying when I came in?"

Rose hesitated.

"I should like to know, dear Rose," she said, pleadingly. "I fancy it was about *something*."

"It was about you, Annie. We were

wondering when Nigel would come back. I was saying I knew he would come; and you know I am generally right."

Anne's pale face was pale no more; and she clutched her handkerchief tightly in her hands. While the emotion lasted she said not a word; but when the colour faded from her cheek, and left it still more ashy white, she said, "Yes, I know he will come."

"Do you?" Rose asked, enquiringly and doubtfully.

"Yes, he will come at last; but when he comes you may have to comfort him; for," she continued, in tones of tremulous passion, "then he will *know* I was not false. And you will do it, Rose," she added, calmly. "Will you not, for my sake?"

"Oh, Annie ; this is nonsense !" Rose said, under playful, decided words hiding the terrors her sister's speech inspired. "Pray don't speak so foolishly."

"I will not again. I only intended *once* to say it to you, knowing you would not forget. I know I may be mistaken in what I think ; so don't tell Katherine. She has anxiety enough."

"You feel better, don't you ?" Rose said, unable to conceal her fears.

"Yes, certainly better," she replied. And from these words, very steadily spoken, Rose gathered encouragement, banished her dread, and endeavoured to forget the words that had preceded them.

Mr. Hope came at the hour appointed by Katherine ; and, as he entered the room, his purpose suddenly burst upon

her understanding. Wrapt for many months entirely in Anne's affairs, he might have made his wishes far more clear than he had done, without attracting her attention; but, from some sudden intuition, she understood it now ; and she, whose happiness it was to make all happy around her, felt her heart sink at the prospect which lay before her. Here was another mystery, by which another had been unconsciously misled.

Her countenance, perhaps, revealed some of the agitation she felt ; but she said, quite quietly, "You have something to say to me?"

"Yes," he replied. "You have guessed perhaps, or you guess now, what that something is ; but I have another request

first to make. Let us leave that alone for the present. My request is, that you will listen to my history; to the history of the blighted life of one who began that life with many hopes, and little thought of fear."

"I will, willingly," she replied, with kindness; "that or anything else I *can* do."

The slight emphasis on one word was not unnoticed by the person to whom she spoke; but he seemed little affected by it. Other thoughts at that moment had the predominance in his mind; in one class of reflections he seemed absorbed; and when he began to speak, his words flowed with an extraordinary fluency—not with eloquence, choice of words, or care of periods—but as with the flowing forth of

his whole self; as water pent up flows out when once the obstacle to its course is removed.

MR. HOPE'S STORY.

"You know me, Miss Dacre, as I am now. That knowledge gives, as I should imagine, at least, no conception of what I was in my early days. If, now and then, something of the ardour of character which then possessed me recalls itself by sudden emotion to my mind, it is so rarely, that I think of myself, and can speak of myself, in those days, as if I spoke of a stranger. I was, in a singular degree, impulsive and passionate; not without many elements of a right and sound mind; not without will and power to carry out any and every determination;

I formed; but, still, so much the prey of quick and impetuous feelings, that my strong will, while it added force to these, could not—I speak only as man speaks—could not control them. I could love, and I could also hate; I could pity, and I could also resent; and, unaccustomed to that close scrutiny which only religion teaches, the evil part of my feelings grew up, unsuspected, as vigorously as the good. I say all this, as my story needs this excuse, such poor excuse as it may give.

“You know my early history. It has often been called praiseworthy; but, to me, it seems that no honourable mind could live under the load of a father’s debts; and, to do what I did, seems as natural to me as to breathe. That I preferred to keep my home with toil,

sooner than have comparative ease without it, was a mere matter of choice and taste. To some natures one, to some the other, might be preferable. I was impetuously formed, and ease was not the thing my mind desired. The pain however, I may say the agony, it cost me to give up my home and country, left its traces on my character. It made me self-reliant. I knew what I could resolve on and do ; and, though I can never remember feeling pride in the resolve itself, I think I became proud of the strength with which I was endowed. I trusted my own heart, and its power of right judging on all occasions, and under all trials.

“But I linger and weary you.

“I went out to India under favourable

circumstances. I had a letter for the Governor-General, and I was immediately employed; and my industry, and the abilities I shewed,—for I had abilities—soon led me to be noticed. A few years passed on, and hope smiled on me. I lived in that strange land as a man, and not a miser, should live, wherever he is placed; and yet I had enough and to spare; and with a good conscience, and good hope, was looking forward to no distant return to the land and the home that were so dear to me. But I myself dashed the joy of life in pieces. It was, I think, nine years after my arrival in India, that I became acquainted with a person”

He stopped; his voice faltered; his lips trembled; and he started from his

seat with a quickness that forced from Katherine the reflection that he had not left as far behind him as he supposed the passionate days of his youth. But if the agitated movement was sudden and rapid, so too was his mastery of himself. He sat down again, saying, "Forgive me; it was but a moment's too vivid recollection, I will proceed, if you will allow me." And though he became very pale, he immediately went on, from the point at which he had paused.

"This person was a widow; but, though a widow, and though she had a son of nine years old, she was in the first bloom of youth and beauty. I met with her at the house of a mutual friend, and for many months met with her constantly, unconscious of the influence she

from the first moment exercised over me. Unconscious, because no thoughts suggestive of a future hope were likely to be excited by her presence. I believed her to be absorbed in an old memory. Her mourning dress, unremarkable and simple as it was, separated her by its sameness and sobriety from the rest of the ever-changing world, and the retiring manners, over which a silent and pensive charm ever hung, inspired a kind of awe that partook of reverence. I cannot better describe her to you than by telling you how often your sister Anne recalls her to my mind. She was like her in her beauty, like her in the virtues and the timidity of her character, and like her, above all, in the fascination she exercises by her gentleness; but

added years, and some experience with sorrow, had, in the case I speak of, trebled the charm. She seemed to live for others, a kind of divine compassion flowing forth in her words and actions. I know I speak foolishly. Forgive me. I will be more brief.

"It was not till after an acquaintance of many months, that I became aware that hope was possible. I was told suddenly, and by chance, that her married life had not been a happy one. Married at sixteen, to one more than twice her years, she had found a tyrant, rather than a husband. She had clung to him, I was told, as weak natures cling to the strong, but the fears he had inspired had left indelible traces on her character.

"This account fired me, as I said, with

a sudden hope ; but I will say for myself that the hope excited was not a selfish one only. I longed to become the protector of one, who, if she had once suffered from tyrannical protection, was now suffering from the want of a protector, who was too timid and gentle to battle with life, and over whose destiny the shadow of past and present trouble hung. Alas ! I was mistaken in my estimate of myself.

“ My views changed ; my manners with them ; and, before very many weeks had passed, my hopes and efforts were crowned with success. I dare not speak of the happiness of that time. My words would be words of madness. I will only say my love was great, and hers seemed to answer to mine. Her nature, one beautiful and tender as your own sister's, came timidly

forth, day by day showing more of its perfection, and day by day hanging more of its hope on me. I was happy” His lip quivered again, and he paused; then again he dashed on. “No matter; why should I linger? I only wish you to understand how great was my love, and trust, and happiness, that you may pity, and, if it be possible, excuse me.

“I must speak of matters of business. Our marriage could not immediately take place, nor even the preparations for it be made. She was ignorant as a child in the affairs of life, and the one friend in whom she trusted, himself a partner in a house of business, was absent from Calcutta. We had to await his return. We cared little; we were happy; we could wait. But there seems to me now to have been a

hand of Providence uplifted for my punishment in this ; since, had he been there, and had all her affairs been made known to me, my life could scarcely have been what it has been.

“ A few weeks passed, and then . . . It was at this time, that in a society too much inclined to malice and uncharitableness, and the thousand evils attending them, a tale of scandal was set abroad regarding her whom I had looked on as an angel of light. False, false ; not for one moment shall your thoughts condemn her. I will not offend your ears with the tale. Suffice it to say, it was raised ; it was bandied about ; it grew in size ; it gained form and substance ; and, at length, it reached my ears. I have told you what I was in those days ; how passionate and impetuous ;

I have told you how madly I loved. Let this excuse me, though there is no excuse. God forgive me. The tale was told, and there were circumstances—the absence of this friend was one among them—which seemed to have been contrived to blind me. Alas! alas! what can I say? I believed it. Believed, and lost, I verily think, my senses. I, who knew her to be spotless as snow, believed it. Forgive me, I will not linger. I went to her; I reproached her with her guilt. Her speechless terror at my madness, her shrinking in silent horror at my words, were, to my eyes, but acknowledgment of that guilt, and the agonies of shame. I left her; I did worse; I made her a public example; publicly I renounced our engagement, and fled away, leaving her alone,

unprotected, to the malice and slander of the world; to the cruelty of the evil tongues that had assailed her.

"I fled away. I scarcely knew where, in rage, and jealousy, and despair. I travelled, heedless of the burning climate, for a day and a half; and then broke down, and lost my senses, in good truth. A brain fever came on, and for three weeks I lay between life and death;—but, thank God, miserable as my life has been, He did not call me away with that unrepented sin on my head. In the slow, silent hours of convalescence, I had time and power to think; and, with thought, my conscience began to prick me, and remorse to lay hold on my soul. Yet it was feebly to what it should have been. Jealousy still made me mad, for I loved

her still; and no passion so blinds the eyes, and distorts the sense of sight, as jealousy. I began to suffer; but to her wrongs I opposed my own, and those, even while they maddened my heart, stilled my conscience. But the time of retribution was at hand.

“While still lingering, slow, because indifferent to recovery, a letter from a friend reached me. It should have reached me ten days before, but no one knew whither I had flown. He said he thought it right to let me know some circumstances which seemed altogether to destroy the evidence of her guilt; yet that, at the same time, there was this confirmation of it, that she had disappeared, how or whither he could not tell.

“There are moments . . .” Mr. Hope

paused and passed his hand over his eyes, as if to shut out some hateful vision. "No; I cannot attempt to describe to you what that awakening was. It was strange, but, at the first expression of doubt, my suspicions, my jealous madness, died away. I *knew* she was innocent; but that fury of jealousy passed by only to be replaced by the agonies of remorse for the past, and of dread for the future. She had disappeared. One thought, you may imagine what awful one, took possession of my soul. I thought that, weak and trembling, unable to contend with scorn and reproach, she had flown from man's fury, to throw herself on the mercy of God; I thought *I*, her sworn protector, had driven her to this. I cannot dwell on these thoughts. I hurried to Calcutta, unfit as I was to travel, and

with the heat, and the haste, and my own agonized mind, I arrived only to be prostrated under a second fit of illness. Again I struggled through, but when I rose up, a second time, my hair was as you see it now. That bore witness to the horrors of my mind. Some relief was now afforded me. As soon as my head was clear enough to understand, it was made known to me that she had disappeared in company with her child and an old servant. From my first awful dread, that knowledge relieved me, and as soon as I was able, with something of new and sanguine hope, I began to search for her.

“And from that day to this I have searched, and in vain; a fatality seemed to pursue my enquiries; the friend who had knowledge of her affairs had left

Calcutta for Madras. I followed him there, and found him dead. I returned to Calcutta, to the house in which he had been a partner, but no information was forthcoming, the management of her affairs had been withdrawn from their house by that friend now dead, many weeks before I made my enquiries. I applied to the relations of her husband, but in vain. I applied to some in England, who were relations, though distant ones, of her own; but in vain. I employed, both at Calcutta and in London, agents to discover her; but, till this hour, in vain. Clue after clue has been found, year after year have I been deluded with false hopes; or hopes that, in the event, proved themselves fallacious; and the clue has been lost, and the hopes have vanished, and I am now

on the borders of age, lonely, cheerless, repentant, but unable, though I trust accepted of God, to make amends on earth for deeds done in my sinful youth."

He paused again.

"You have indeed suffered," Katherine said, gently. "I think you may now forgive yourself."

He sighed a heavy sigh, as if rolling away a burden before him, and then said: "Thank you for listening to me. It has done me good, or will do so; for you have listened, and have not shrunk from me. Forgiveness of myself is impossible, but When I came to England, I came still searching, yet almost resolving to put away the memory of the past, and to endeavour, even yet, to form to myself a future. I

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prayed then, and fervently, that if my sins were forgiven above, some hope for future peace to my soul might be set before me. I came in doubt and fear, but my prayer has in some degree been answered. I have found a home and friends, and, even already, life is not so cheerless as it was. I made last spring a last effort to discover what I had lost ; I said to myself if that failed I would look upon it as an intimation from Providence that I might turn my thoughts to take refreshment here on earth. It failed ; she must have changed her name again and again to elude me thus. It failed, I say ; and I accepted, with thankfulness, the sign that I had chosen, and dared to turn my thoughts towards a future. I—joyless, hopeless, al-

most heartless, I say—I dared to turn, and now . . .”

He stopped again, rose up, and walked to a window, and stood there, gazing out, with his back turned to Katherine.

But a strange thought had flashed like lightning on Katherine's mind; and she, scarcely thinking of the event impending over herself, sat wrapt in thought how best to deal with this vague yet startling idea. While he stood at the window, she got up; and, unperceived, hastened from the room.

When she returned, a small parcel was in her hand.

He had discovered her departure, and the discovery had roused him from his mournful abstraction. It had turned his thoughts from the past to the future.

"You fly from me," he said, in a voice of calm but great sadness. "It is just ; yet, before you decide, hear me farther."

"Wait!" she said, trembling with agitation. "I have an idea . . . I cannot tell . . . It may not be possible . . . But wait . . . Will you not tell me the name of her you have so long sought?"

He sprang towards her with an eagerness that terrified, a suddenness that almost took from her the power of thought. "What have you heard?" he cried. "Speak! I beseech you speak!"

"It may be nothing," she said, tremulously; "it is but a thought; but look. Are here any of the names of her you seek?" And she opened and placed in his hand the volume of the *Odyssey* lent her by Trevethlan years before, and never returned, from that

day to this. On the open page was the schoolboy writing: "George Henry Alwyn Herbert Trevethlan. His book."

That she had rightly guessed, was immediately apparent. But no sound, no joyful exclamation, revealed the fact. Mr. Hope stood gazing on the page with fixed eyes, and lips tightly pressed together; a low, gasping breathing the only sound that broke the dead stillness of the room.

So they stood; Katherine's heart beating with irrepressible emotion, till Mr. Hope laid down the book; and, suddenly clasping his hands together, said, solemnly, "Now, God Almighty be thanked for his goodness to me a sinner." And again the same dead silence followed. Uncertain how to act, feeling all words inappropriate to the

moment, Katherine, at last, drew back a few steps, and sat down ; and her movements roused him from thought, from that trance of thought, at least. Taking the book again in his hand, he followed her ; and, fixing his eyes upon her, softly asked, "Whence had you this book ?"

Katherine blushed ; she would have given worlds to be calm and unconscious, but she could not attain to that state. She blushed, and averted her eyes, but answered, "Mr. Trevethlan lent it to me, many years ago. He used to visit at Brackleigh when the Brandons had it ; I knew him then, but have never seen him since."

"Do I rightly understand ?" Mr. Hope said, bending towards her, and gazing at her with a look of anxious, enquiring

tenderness. "Am I right in imagining what Mr. Trevethlan was to you?" He held out his hand to her as he spoke.

It was an awkward moment, but Katherine, more thoughtful for him than for herself, felt what the awkwardness was to him, and relieved it as best she could. Unwilling to confess in words, yet conscious of all that her action confessed, she turned away her head from his gaze; and, in answer, in acquiescence, silently put her hand in his.

"Thank God, again," he said in tones strangely unlike the quiet self-possession of his usual manner of speech; "that, in His gracious goodness, He has so ordered it, that what brings peace to me brings no pain to my benefactress. If the hopes, if the prayers of these last months had been

answered, it would not have been so. You have been very dear to me, and God knows I would have striven to make you happy, but all is well. Farewell, vain dreams; God be thanked, new ones have sprung from their ashes." He gently raised her hand to his lips and kissed it, and again stood in thought so deep that Katherine began to feel this trying interview was never to be at an end.

"You are certain she lives?" was a question next asked, with startling suddenness.

"I think so," Katherine replied. "Last year Mr. Frankland met him in London, and I am sure she then lived. But you understand," she repeated, with great earnestness, "I know nothing of him now. It is seven years since we have met."

"Yes, I perfectly understand," he said, fixing on her a look of grave, steady understanding and admiration. "I will ask but one word more. It may save time. Can you tell me where I shall find him?"

"I don't know," Katherine said, blushing. "I never heard; but he is a barrister. You will have little difficulty."

"A barrister! No, none. Then I will trouble you no more. Thank you for all your goodness to me, and God bless you for it for ever. Pray for me now, that in my life's last venture I may prosper." He shook hands with her, and hastened from the room; and as, in flying back to Anne after this lengthened absence, Katherine passed the window, she saw him speeding along, if not with the wings of a lover, with the steps of one impelled by

some equally impetuous passion. She sighed and smiled : a sigh over the emotions she had witnessed ; a smile of hope and thankfulness at what she had been spared, at what she had been enabled to do, and at the fair prospects which she saw dawning for him in the future.

CHAPTER XXX.

Yes, the rights! for what greater to man may belong,
Than the right to repair in the future, the wrong
To the past. LUCILLA.

"Is Mr. Trevethlan at home?" Mr. Hope asked of Trevethlan's clerk, on the afternoon of the following day; and being answered in the affirmative, continued, "Will you tell him that a person wishes to speak to him on important business?"

"What name?" asked the discreet young clerk.

"No name," said Mr. Hope with an air of command. "I said a person. Go."

And he went.

From the report he gave, the person was admitted, and Trevethlan stood up, with some curiosity, to receive him. He was no longer a briefless barrister; but briefs did not flow so thick and fast, but that a nameless stranger was a source of some excitement.

The stranger entered, and approached him; and, as soon as the door was closed, gravely said, "Do you know me, George?"

Trevethlan stretched out his hand with a smile; that kind of unmeaning smile with which the greeting of one evidently an acquaintance, yet a forgotten one, is received; but before the hand was given, it was withdrawn. The feeling that arrest-

ed him was not remembrance; the change in Mr. Hope was too great for that; but, as he met the steadfast gaze of the dark eyes, a flash like lightning carried him back to the days of his boyhood; and, as by instinct, his guest was recognized. And as the recognition came, he drew back with looks of contempt and disgust.

The seven years that had passed over Trevethlan's head—years of industry, years of self-restraint and irreproachable life—had not left him altogether improved. Wrapt in his mother, wholly devoted to her, with her he was ever loving and gentle; but that exclusive devotion led him into solitary habits, and his mind and manners had profited less by solitude than they might have done in a freer intercourse with the world. In essentials

he was unchanged; his character as full of sense and worth as ever it had been; but the surface of the inward as well as the outward man had acquired defects. Abrupt at times, and obstinate always, he required smoothing and softening; but in solitude this smoothing is seldom gained; and Trevethlan had certainly become more self-willed, more attached to his own way, and wedded to his own opinions, than was at all necessary. He was kind and unselfish in great points; but considerateness for the minor feelings that came under his notice, always excepting those of his mother, was less his study than it ought to have been.

Ever since the day when first he had heard the tale of his mother's wrongs, he had taken resentment to his heart; and

the soil of his heart was so formed that that seed found a ready reception. Unconscious that he cherished an evil thing, he cherished it as a sacred duty; and now, as the enemy of his mother's peace stood before him, all the anger and scorn pent up for years in his breast, came forth, and glowed in his expressive face. Never in his long life of repentance had Mr. Hope felt so humbled as before the scorn of one who once had been as his child. His eyes drooped, and his head sank before it.

"You know me, George?" he repeated, mournfully.

Trevethlan did not speak till his fiercer feelings were mastered; but there was worse than anger in the cool, and even

insolent contempt of the enquiry, "May I ask to what I am indebted for the honour of this visit?"

Mr. Hope's pale cheek crimsoned. Unprepared for this particular form of resentment, his still warm blood chafed beneath it. He remained silent, though with effort, and kept his eyes bent upon the ground. Though it was no longer humiliation that kept them fixed, the attitude was of shame and humility. Untouched by the sight, however, Trevethlan spoke again, with less of coolness, but even more of harshness.

"This visit is as unwelcome as it is unexpected. This place, and this presence, are the very last on earth that you should dare to seek."

"The last, George?" Mr. Hope said, with agitation. "No, the first. Long sought, and too late found."

"I said the last," Trevethlan said, sternly. "You and I can have nothing in common."

There was a pause, and then Mr. Hope recovered himself. Drawing up his figure, and lifting his eyes to Trevethlan's face, he said, with grave dignity, "Your anger is just; but to shut the door of repentance is not just. You have shut it on me too long."

There are tones and manners which awe and soften the hearts of the most prejudiced. Trevethlan's mind insensibly underwent a change; and, in a voice far more respectful, he asked, "For what purpose do you seek me?"

"I am come to ask your forgiveness first."

"My forgiveness," he said, relapsing into his ironical tone, "is not so lightly given."

"I would not have it lightly given; but if you are man, surely it is to be won. Tell me how."

It was in the same serious, and almost commanding manner, that he spoke. Trevethlan seemed subdued. He drew nearer, and entered into a conference with him; and scarcely was conscious how great a change must have taken place in his own feelings, when he could thus confer with his mother's enemy.

"Mr. Hope," he said, gravely pronouncing his name, "it is an easy thing to say the words, I forgive; but if you are indeed the person I suppose you to be, you must know well that forgiveness from

me would be no trifle. It is only idle to ask me to forgive."

"But can nothing avail to move your heart to forgive? Do days, months, years of hopeless, loveless, homeless life, say nothing? Can the agonizing pangs of remorse and despair win no pity?"

The tones were passionate, but Trevethlan, unmoved, fixed on him a keen and searching gaze, and said, coldly, "Hopeless, homeless life. The report I heard was far different. I heard of you, and no long time since, at home, and hopeful, and happy, the honoured and admired of all."

A flush stole over Mr. Hope's cheek, but he simply said, "I have ever held him only half a man who obtrudes his sins and sorrows on every idle ear."

And again Trevethlan was conquered, and, ashamed of the arrogant superiority he had assumed, said, with frankness, and even with an approach to cordiality, "You are right. It was wrong to judge you as I did. I confess, when I thought of all that was on your head, and heard of you as the honoured lord of rich and poor, my blood boiled within me."

"In your place, so might I have judged; but we should both have been unjust."

Trevethlan paused a moment, and considered before he spoke again; he then said, "You said you came *first* for my forgiveness, Mr. Hope. I am a stubborn; and, perhaps, at all times a resentful man. I am not certain that it is in my nature to forgive, but, if possible for myself, it is far less easy when a mother, dear, and

justly dear, as mine is, is concerned. Let us leave that question of forgiveness to itself, and tell me again why do you come?"

"For your forgiveness first, and then for *hers*."

"It is in vain," Trevethlan said, shaking his head, sadly. "You must leave her in peace."

"I bring peace. Oh! George, deny me not. Let me be forgiven. Let her forgive."

"I say it is impossible," he said, somewhat harshly. "You ask what I should be mad to allow."

"Now, George, hear me," Mr. Hope said, with calm and yet passionate earnestness. "I am no longer in my rash youth. I know what I ask; have

weighed it all, and am convinced that since God has permitted me to find her, it is His will that we should have peace. You have guarded her well, too well. Did it never strike you that man may err, even as I erred, and yet repent? Did you never feel that, even fallen as I fell, a man is not a brute; and through his fall may rise more worthy than before? Did it never strike you that by your too careful guarding you might drive a fellow-creature to despair? Are you so perfect yourself that you have no pity for the frail errors of our mortal flesh?"

"I understand you," Trevethlan said, compassionately. "I own I never looked on your case in that light before. Yet it was no plan of mine to conceal our-

selves as we have done. It was done by my poor mother, before I had power to reason. When I could reason, I might perhaps have acted otherwise, but it was then too late." He paused a moment, and then said, with hesitation, "My poor mother is not quite herself. All is not as it should be here." And he sadly touched his brow.

"Alas! But I will heal her. Oh! George, trust me, I will heal her."

Trevethlan shook his head. "Whatever I may have done, Mr. Hope, I feel for you now, and I believe I can say I forgive. There," he said, holding out his hand. "I never thought to have done that act, or to have raised my hand towards you, except, perhaps, in some mad moment, to punish. But my

anger has melted. I forgive; and you may trust me, when I say I forgive, I do. There is no anger, therefore, in my words. I tell you plain facts. As long almost as I can remember, my dear mother has not been quite as others are. More perfect than any; in many respects more wise; but not right *here*." And again he touched his brow. "If a wrong chord was struck upon, she shewed too plainly that she was not mistress of herself. Of late years this excitement of brain has increased, and I was the cause. Some seven years ago I was down at Brackleigh. I saw your picture; I heard you spoken of; and I knew that melancholy had settled on your soul. Then, for the first time, and for a short time, I felt pity; and I resolved to try and win

from my mother that you might be forgiven. I spoke; but there was the wrong chord. You yourself were the cause. You made her mad; she fell into a fit of trembling, of horror and dread, from which, with much ado, we roused her; and from that day to this she has been still less herself, and from that day to this I have never dared to breathe your name. Can you wonder at what I felt towards you, when the very thought of you excited horror like this? My pity fled, and with it all thoughts of forgiveness. And now you see why your request must be for ever in vain."

"No, George," Mr. Hope said, after a few moments of thought, "I cannot consent that it shall be in vain. The chance, no

matter what, that revealed to me your secret, must have been sent by the Author of all good for some good purpose. He has had pity on me; perhaps on her. I think, and I am no excited enthusiast, that it is His will to bring us together. I think I do but obey His promptings when I say it *must* be done. Without your consent it shall not be, though it might have been; but consent you must."

"Mr. Hope, I cannot," Trevethlan said, with the vexed air of one who, after speaking plain common sense, finds himself not understood. "I tell you that if once again I dared to breathe your name to my poor mother, the next step might be you know what it might be. I cannot peril it."

"You shall not, George, you shall not,

it were too great a risk. What now is done, must be done by me."

"By you, Mr. Hope? Are you mad?"

"By me, George, and by none else. I am not mad. Listen. Is it not fitting that he who dealt the blow should heal it? Is it not possible that he who had such strange, such mighty power to wound, should be the only one whose power is strong enough to make whole—under God, to make whole? Think of this; for many years, twenty, George, or more, you have had her under your care, and you have had no power to heal her blighted heart. You hid her from me Pardon it was not you she was hidden from me, or long, long since, I should have found my pardon, and she her health. Oh! George,

deny me not now. I feel impelled to seek her out; I have sought and found; give your consent, and all may yet be well."

"There is truth in what you say," Trevethlan said, musingly.

"It is a risk, I know; I feel too well it is a risk; and yet I cannot think I shall again be made, repentant as I am, an instrument of evil. Something here assures me it shall be well."

"I consent," Trevethlan said, at last, slowly and reluctantly; "how unwillingly, God knows; but I cannot deny the truth of what you say. My mother, my dear mother, she will think I abandon her! You have asked a great thing, Mr. Hope; how great I believe you can hardly tell"

"I can, George. Believe me, I can. I

know what I ask, and what you have overcome in consenting. But you *have* consented, and this is no time for words. Let us be going !”

“Now ?” Trevethlan cried, startled, and drawing back.

“Why delay one hour ? Since there can be no preparation, what use is there in delay ? Let us be gone !”

And surprised almost out of his senses, and robbed of his power of judging aright, Trevethlan submitted himself to the ardour of his companion, and went with him.

They no longer lived in the house in Belgravia. On Mr. Hope's return to England, Trevethlan, dreading fresh and more well-directed inquiries, had taken

lodgings, large and roomy ones, in a house in the Regent's Park. Thither he bent his steps. It was a long walk, and many a time he felt inclined to shake off his companion and escape ; but, long accustomed to control his impulses, these suggestions were put aside ; and having entered into the engagement, he held to it. But his heart was sad and fearful ; and, though much might have been asked, he walked along almost in silence.

Mr. Hope was more silent still ; holding Trevethlan's arm, submitting to him as guide, and the while communing with his own heart.

Is Stephen with you still ?" he asked as they approached the house.

"Yes ; poor old fellow ! He does what he can."

"Then he must be my herald."

"As you will," Trevethlan said, gravely.

"You must do as you please."

And on entering the house, with a doorway, Trevethlan called Stephen into the passage, where Mr. Hope stood.

He came hobbling—an old man, with white hair, and a respectable but portly exterior.

"Speak to that gentleman, Stephen," Trevethlan said, and disappeared into a room adjoining.

"Do you remember Mr. Hope, Stephen?" was the question asked, with grave, piercing looks.

"Mr. Hope? Yes; the rascal!" was the reassuring reply.

"I am he, Stephen. Look at me. I am come to see your mistress."

"Law! Where's Mr. George?" And he made a hobbling step.

Mr. Hope laid his hand on his shoulder. "I have his leave. Fear nothing. I want your assistance. It is no time for words. Do as I bid you."

"Oh, law! Oh, law!" said the old man, aghast. "I knew the day would come. I knew it would."

"Go up to your mistress, Stephen, and tell her, as gently and quietly as you can, that a person she knew many years ago is come to see her. That is all you have to say. I shall be at the door. Retreat as fast as you can. Leave the room, I mean, and leave her to me."

"Law bless you, sir, she'll die. You don't know her, poor soul. I must ask Mr. George."

"I have his leave. She will not die, God help us, but live to bless us, if it be His will. Do as I bid you." And he assumed that air of command, which ever came at his call, as the one most natural to him.

The expression of the old man's face was almost ludicrous in its pitiable helplessness; but, unable to withstand the command given, he began, puffing and blowing as he went, to ascend the stairs. Mr. Hope slowly followed him.

The dull December day had closed in. The curtains were drawn, and a large lamp stood on the table. It was nearly the hour of Trevethlan's usual return, and a bright fire was awaiting him.

Mrs. Trevethlan lay on the sofa. The lamp fell on her face, and shewed it lovely

still, but marked by the emotions of seven years as they had passed over it, coming and going, and leaving her ever suffering with nameless mental suffering. The cheek was paler, the features sharper, the skin more transparent, but, strange to say, though thus accustomed to mental sorrow, not a thread of grey was visible in her hair. It was a young face still, and a lovely one. She was reading some book of devotion, as was now her unceasing custom.

She laid it down as old Stephen entered, and her soft voice said, "George, dear ; so soon to-night ?"

"No, ma'am, not Mr. George. It's me." And he stood and puffed, uncertain what to say next.

She cast down her eyes upon the book, and began to read again.

"There's a person, ma'am, wants to see you." And he gave another puff, and began to retreat to the door, that he might make his exit as speedily as was required.

"A person?" she said, raising her eyes quickly, and speaking with agitation. "Who wants *me*; who wants to see *me*?"

"A person as says he knowed you a good many years ago, ma'am; and Mr. George said he might come up."

"Who?" she cried, with a scream, and put her hands before her eyes.

In that moment the transformation was effected. Stephen disappeared, and Mr. Hope closed the door, and flew to her side. "I, Isabel! I, Hedworth. I am

come to be forgiven." And he knelt by the side of her couch.

She stared at him, the large eyes opening wider and wider, and an awful look of vacancy stealing over them. Mr. Hope watched her with terror, but did not lose his presence of mind.

"Isabel!" he cried, in accents of passionate love, familiar to her ears long years before, twining, as he spoke, his arm round her waist. "I am Hedworth, who have sought you repenting, for all these weary years. Have pity upon me, and live to pardon me!"

He knew well to whom he spoke. No soul so pitying as hers in all the wide world. She turned her eyes upon him, the departing intellect apparently arrested by the piercing accents of his voice.

"Hedworth!" she pronounced, tremulously. "Is it *he*?"

"Come to be forgiven. Come for one blessing. Oh, Isabel! so madly sought, so late found, have pity, and forgive."

"Forgive!" she said, softly. "Oh, Hedworth! have *you* suffered? I see you have. God forgive me. God forgive me," she repeated, her voice taking a tone of excitement, clasping her hands together, and withdrawing herself from his arm. "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen, Amen, Amen."

"Alas!" he thought, as like one inspired, with her eyes turned far upwards, she sat gazing; inspired, yet with an unsettled inspiration.

But he had scarcely time to mark the excited eye before the cloud passed ; she dropped her eyelids, and, turning to him, said, with an ineffable sweetness of look and tone, " We are forgiven, Hedworth, you and I ; and there is peace on earth, and peace in heaven, for us both. God bless you." And she softly laid her hand on his head.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Cosa fatta, capo ha.

"WHAT have you heard to day, Ben?—is there news?" enquired Mrs. Frankland of her husband, as he entered the drawing-room, about a week after the date of the last chapter, looking grim, yet full of intelligence.

"News!" closing the door with an angry slap, "I should rather think there is. What do you think now, Bessie? It's awful to see what the world is coming to. Hope is going to be married."

"Well," said Mrs. Frankland, smiling, "I see no very awful news in that. To tell you the truth, I am not the least surprised, for he as much as told me, a fortnight ago, that he hoped it might be."

"Oh! you're not surprised, Madam. Is that what you say? Who do you suppose the chosen wife to be, pray?"

"Katherine Dacre," she replied, smiling confidently, and with a little bit of that importance which the possessors of a secret almost invariably possess. "He as much as told me he should try, and I thought, Ben, you would have been as little surprised as I am."

"But it is *not* Katherine Dacre," he said, with a grim smile of triumph. "And now, Madam, perhaps you *are* a little surprised."

"Not Katherine Dacre?" and Mrs. Frank-

land became pale with astonishment and fear.

"No. It is some old hag from London. And now I think you will allow I may be surprised."

"It is a jest, Ben, depend upon it. I know so well what he felt."

"A jest! I tell you I saw it in black and white. I saw it in his own hand to Roper; and the marriage is to take place in three weeks. And now, Madam, perhaps you will own to being surprised."

"Surprised, Ben! I am shocked, indescribably shocked." And she looked so flurried, that she began, cold as the morning was, to fan herself with her large green fan.

"Another viper!" Mr. Frankland exclaimed, standing up, tall and stiff, and

speaking through his closed teeth, "a viper cherished in my bosom. I would call him a jackanapes, but it's too good a name. A young viper may have some excuse, but an old viper The world may be burnt up, and all it contains, for what I care; there's nothing worth saving unless, perhaps, a woman or two," relenting, and speaking mournfully. "Poor Katherine! Why, those Dacres seem doomed to be the prey of the vipers. God help us all, if grey-headed men take to the pranks of wicked boys."

"Now tell me more, Ben," Mrs. Frankland asked, anxiously. "I cannot bear, even in thought, to condemn one so good, and upright, and conscientious in all his ways."

"Upright? What, to go and make love to one woman, and then marry another? If that is upright, it would be well if we were all crooked, then."

"Make love is too strong a word. He never did. *I* saw what he meant, and I fancied you did; but I have often doubted whether Katherine did."

"Then she was a blind beetle! It was as plain as the book of Job. I tell you there is no doubt in the matter. He writes to Roper to tell him that peculiar circumstances have occurred, which have thrown together himself and a person to whom he was engaged in early life, and that she has consented to an immediate marriage. Peculiar circumstances! The plea of knaves!"

"Light begins to dawn, Ben. I see

my way more clearly. Depend upon it, all is good and true."

"If this is your opinion, Betsey, I don't care how soon we are divorced."

"What more did he say?" she asked, smiling.

"I believe there was a message to you, that you should shortly hear from him. But what's the use of hearing? Actions are the tests. We can make any foul thing fair, if we paint it up."

Mrs. Frankland's brow cleared. "I was wrong, even for a moment, to condemn him," she said. "What a poor friend I make. And who is the lady, Ben; did he say?"

"Didn't I tell you? It's that young fellow Trevethlan's mother. Well, I wish him joy of his choice. I have heard of men being unfaithful to old hags for the

sake of a young face, but I never heard of a young wife being forsaken for the sake of an old hag. But we live and learn. Good morning, Madam, and I hope you will allow that you *are* surprised." And looking sourer than usual, Mr. Frankland left the room, and for an hour or two strolled about, in the hope of hearing further particulars, without demeaning himself to ask for them.

And while he wandered in vain, Mr. Roper called on Mrs. Frankland, and gave her all the information that was possible on the subject. In the first place, he brought her Mr. Hope's letter to read. It was in these words:—

"Dear Mr. Roper,

"I write to tell you of an event which may possibly surprise

you; but of which I hope you will not disapprove. I am going to be married. Peculiar circumstances have thrown me again into the society of a person to whom I was engaged in early life, and from whom my own faults alone separated me. She is willing to forgive, and to allow me, by the devotion of my future life, to try to redeem the past. We are to be married in three weeks; on New Year's day, if possible, and at Brackleigh. The marriage will take place in the afternoon, and my reason for writing to you is to request you to consent to perform the ceremony. Her fragile health, and the dangers attending excitement and expectation, have caused this seeming haste in our arrangements, and for the same reason, as you may imagine, extreme quiet and privacy will

be necessary. Will you be good enough to tell Mrs. Frankland of this event, and to assure her that as soon as possible she shall hear from me further on the subject. I have been much hurried in making arrangements, and still, indeed, have scarcely time to write.

"I remain, very faithfully yours,

"H. HOPE.

"In my haste I believe I have omitted to say that she is the mother of George Trevethlan, who was known to you a few years ago at Brackleigh."

"This is very unexpected, Mr. Roper," observed Mrs. Frankland, laying down the letter.

"Unexpected, indeed. As I observed to my wife just now, life is a drama, and a single instant suffices to shift the scenes."

"Are you glad, or are you sorry?" she asked, anxious to discover how far Mr. Hope's late intentions had betrayed themselves.

"Sincerely glad," he said, heartily. "There was a loneliness about that large house which pained me. I once took on myself to observe to Mr. Hope that it was not good for man to be alone; but though courteously, my suggestion was not cordially received, and I allowed the subject to drop."

"That a wife was desirable, there can be no doubt; the question is, what wife? Mr. Hope, whatever his number of years may be, is essentially a young man, and I rather doubt the suitableness of an elderly wife. However, I suppose he knows best."

"I fancy so. In matters of affection

our own wishes are our best guides. At the same time," he continued, drawing his chair closer to the fire, "I will confess that this event is an unexpected one. In idle talk over the hearth, my wife and I have been indulging in conjectures, idle as it appears, but such conjectures as made the announcement I have heard a surprising, and, in the first moment, a painful one."

"You conjectured that Miss Dacre, I suppose, was Mr. Hope's object?"

"Exactly so. Nothing escapes you, Mrs. Frankland."

"You said, in the first moment a painful one. My conjectures were like yours; and I should be glad to know that this event pained you no longer."

"Then, my dear madam, you may be relieved of all anxiety. In the intense

sympathy felt by my wife and myself in the affairs of the Miss Dacres, I could not allow Miss Dacre to hear this announcement from any less friendly lips than mine. I was on my way to her when I met Mr. Frankland, but reasons of delicacy, as you may imagine, kept me silent as to my errand."

"Well," asked Mrs. Frankland, anxiously, "did you see her?"

"I did. She received my news with interest—with smiling interest—but without the smallest appearance of emotion. I think she observed that it was not altogether an unexpected event ; but Miss Rose was very curious, and asked me so many questions, that I am not certain this was the purport of an observation she made."

"Perhaps Rose thought as we did,"

observed Mrs. Frankland. Then, after a moment—"Well, it is a mystery. How was Anne to-day?"

"She had not appeared. Miss Dacre spoke sadly when I made my inquiries regarding her. Mr. Dacre, I fear, still refuses his consent to change of scene; and how this state of things will terminate, I dread to think."

"My hope is," said Mrs. Frankland, "that Nigel Grey, when he hears how ill she is, will return. Poor child! He little knows what he has done."

Mr. Roper swallowed down his secret, and asked, curiously: "Do you anticipate, then, that Mr. Grey will return?"

"If he does not, I give him up," she said, warmly.

"But you suppose him, then, to be aware of poor Miss Anne's state?"

"Certainly, by this time. Janet has written more than once; and Mrs. Grey, who feels deeply for Anne, has also written, imploring him to return."

"Indeed! The doubt is," said Mr. Roper, thoughtfully, "in what manner the communication has been made. The youthful breast resents dictation, or that which has the appearance of dictation. I have observed this, on many occasions, among the young members of my flock; and man, Mrs. Frankland, in rich or poor, is the same being."

"If the mere fact of her illness does not bring him back, I give him up," said Mrs. Frankland, warmly.

Their conversation was here interrupted by the entrance of Janet, breathless with haste and news. She was in the habit of borrowing books from the Brackleigh Library ; and, aware of Mr. Hope's absence, and unaware of any impending event, had walked to Brackleigh this morning, to make a selection at leisure. She had found the house "topsy-turvy," as Mrs. Plumtre expressed it ; and that lady herself was somewhat indignant at the short notice allowed for preparing the house for a mistress. Three rooms, *en suite*, were to be papered and new furnished ; and how ever, with so many men about, she was to give a thorough cleaning, she did not see. "But I always knew, Miss Grey," she added, "that

that white head had a tale ; and, of course, this lady was the cause. I have said to Mr. Smalldridge, a hundred times, that there was a lady in the case ; and now he will own I was right."

In the course of the day, and in the evening, Janet endeavoured to amuse her uncle with an account of Mrs. Plumtre's speeches and perplexities ; but Mr. Frankland was not a man of versatile mind ; and, though assured by his wife of Katherine's indifference to the news, he could not reconcile Mr. Hope's conduct to his notions of right and honour ; and refused, therefore, to be amused. Indirectly he gathered up all possible particulars regarding the event ; but he would neither show interest, nor vouchsafe a smile.

How much his having been so thoroughly deceived, and so publicly exhibited as *surprised*, had to do with his resentment, may be imagined, but cannot be ascertained.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Poor heart ! a victim always at the call
Of fancied duty ; only then unjust,
Only then obstinate when offering up
Itself a bleeding sacrifice.

OLIVER NEWMAN.

THE last night in the old home, the lately inhabited lodgings in the Regent's Park, was closing in. It was the last night of Trevethlan's guardianship of his mother, the first night of sole possession since the reunion with Mr. Hope. The following day the first step of the two days' journey to Brackleigh was to be made,

whither Mr. Hope had preceded them, to await the arrival of his long-sought bride. One night Mrs. Trevethlan was to rest upon the road ; on the second day, the wedding-day, an easy journey was to convey them to Brackleigh early in the afternoon.

The proposal to be married at Brackleigh, and all the arrangements connected with the removal, had been made by Mrs. Trevethlan herself, and with so much thought and care, and anxiety, that the physician who attended her gave his reluctant consent to the plan ; assuring Trevethlan that in cases where the nervous temperament was so excitable, it was better to run the risk of bodily fatigue than to oppose a wish which had taken hold of the mind.

But the consent was so evidently a reluctant one, a mere choice between two evils, that Trevethlan was miserable.

With a rebellious spirit he had submitted to Mr. Hope's will in seeking out his mother ; more rebelliously still had he heard of their union ; and now, in bitterness of heart, he saw the evil day approach. To say that love to his mother, pure and simple love, was the sole cause, fearing for her welfare, anxious for her happiness, would be to say more than the truth would warrant. The resentment which had died out, which the sight of so much love and penitence forced to die, died reluctantly ; and Trevethlan, in living on amicable terms with him so long thought of as an enemy, repaid himself for the effort, not consciously, but unconsciously, by indulging a rooted

and obstinate dislike. The truth was, he was jealous. So long his mother's sole friend and guardian, the sole depositary of her thoughts, the orderer of all her ways, he suddenly found himself superseded ; to Mr. Hope's will he had to yield ; to his mother's will, for Mr. Hope's happiness, he had to consent. Undoubtedly this was trying. Undoubtedly it required an unselfish nature and faultless temper to bear it without a frown ; and Trevethlan was not faultless. His love for his mother was great and absorbing as that of a lover's, and there was something of a lover's morbid jealousy in the feelings he now cherished. There was, however, so much to be said in favour of his disapprobation of the purposed removal, that he was himself unaware that

it was prompted by any feeling besides common prudence.

There was a great contrast in the countenances of mother and son on this last evening. Mrs. Trevethlan lay stretched on her couch, more wan and exhausted than usual ; her eyes were closed, her hands clasped together, and she lay so still that she might have been in a trance, but for the throb of life which, like a faint breath of air, at intervals moved the folds of her dress. And yet, though pale and exhausted, and though the throb told of awakened and perhaps excited feeling within, an expression of peace lay on her countenance, as the moonbeam on quiet waters. Something like a smile relaxed the muscles of her mouth, and her long lashes rested on her cheek as softly as in the slumber of a child.

By her side sat Trevethlan with his arms folded, and his brows knit. He was not only thoughtful, but was full of gloomy thought, and the expression of his countenance was one of dejection and displeasure. The uncharitable might have called it ill-tempered ; but the more charitable would have perceived that he was full of apprehension and anxiety.

He sat watching his pale mother, and as one unaccustomed to watch the sleep of an infant, starts with fear as some change passes over its features, so he, perceiving suddenly, either by some brighter flash of light, or some intenser gaze from his own eyes, the extreme languor of her attitude, and wanness of her complexion, bent forward, and laid his hand upon her, fearfully.

She was not asleep, and at his touch she opened her eyes and smiled.

The smile, sweet as it was, did not allay his fears; and the long pent up feelings burst forth as he passionately said, "You shall not go, mother. You are unfit. I take on myself to forbid you to go."

"I must, dear George—I must," she replied, gently taking his outstretched hand, and pressing it, with a soft smile, to her lips.

"You must not. It will kill you," he said, more vehemently.

A faint flush flitted over her face, and she replied, "The number of our days is in the hands of God, dear George; we must do what is best, and trust Him for the rest. Even if it should be as you say, I still would go; but he may order it otherwise."

“Mother, you *think* it will be to death!”
And he stooped over her again with a look of agony.

“To life and happiness, if it pleases Him,” she replied. “Dear George, all will be well.”

“You think little now of me or my wishes,” he said, with mournful reproach. “And yet you know I have nothing in this world but you.”

“I do think of you, my dear, dear boy. I do think of you more than any. Should I not think of you, who have been all in all to me, your whole life long, and who have been to me such a son as only the widow and the desolate can know?”

He stooped and kissed her, without speaking, but the cloud of trouble remained on his brow.

"I do not wish to be all the world to you, George, now," she said, in a moment, with a slight smile. "I wish you to build on a newer and stronger foundation. Dear George, your long hope"

"No, mother," he interrupted her, passionately, "that hope has again deluded me, and I shall try to build on it no more. And even if it were still a hope, and if I had a hundred hopes, they are nothing to me, mother, without you. It was for you I sought her; it was for you I waited for her; and without you I care not even if she would come to me. Forgive me, mother, if I am selfish, but the future has a gloomy trouble on its face, and *he* has brought it."

"Now, George, listen to me," she said; taking hold of his hand, and keeping it fast.

“ Since it has pleased God to take away my reproach, I am not as I was *here*; and she raised her fingers to her brow. “ I see things more clearly ; and I see that he has suffered as much, perhaps more than I have done. I ought to have remembered that man repents ; I ought not to have hid myself from his repentance ; I ought not to have left him all these long years to suffer an uncertain misery. It was my infirmity, and God is merciful to our infirmities ; but it was a sore trial for him, and I would comfort it if I can. Dear George, if it were for myself alone, I could have been well content to end my days in peace with you ; happy in your love ; happy in his friendship ; in peace with God and man. But this would have been a selfish happiness, and we must not think only of ourselves.

He could not then have eased his conscience by his devotion ; I should not have been his own, and he could not have given me all. I, who made him suffer so long, wish now to heal his sufferings ; to help him to redeem the past, and to pass his days in the peace of God. Therefore I go to him ; I make his home my home ; and, be my days long or short, I will be his wife and give him a right to bless me. Do you see what I mean, Dear George ? Have I convinced you that I am right ? ”

“ I see that you are an angel, mother,” broke from his lips ; and another kiss was printed on her brow.

“ No, George, no ; no angel ; but a poor weak woman, who longs ” she paused, and her eyes slowly turned upwards.

"Who longs for what?" her son asked, leaning over her, an undefined dread filling his heart with anguish.

"For the time when this corruption shall put on incorruption; and this frail, sinful flesh shall put on immortality. Amen. Even so."

The upward gaze, as she spoke, was like that of saints in pictures, so rapt, so intense; in its intensity bespeaking that the spiritual, for the moment, overbore the temporal; and, by its intensity, shook the equilibrium of sense and reason.

Trevethlan looked at her mournfully, then kissed her, and rose up from where he sat. The wrong that had shaken her might be healed, but the chord that had been shaken trembled still.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It is not the burden, but the over-burden
that kills the beast.

SPANISH PROVERB.

ANOTHER evening passed by, and then came the evening of Mr. Hope's wedding-day. It was a dreary one at Sandlands. Mr. Dacre was in one of his extreme fits of ill-humour. Anne was worse, and Mr. Tyler had on that day informed him that unless she was removed to a climate in which she might have constant air,

and some change of scene, he could not answer for her life. The weakness and depression of her nervous system made air necessary, while the weakness of her chest made it a remedy full of danger, and, where she then was, on many days impossible to use.

Had Mr. Tyler simply said her life was in danger, Mr. Dacre would probably have acquiesced; but, untaught by experience, he dwelt on her nervous depression; and though himself the most nervous of men, with nerves, especially with Anne's nerves, Mr. Dacre had no patience. He was not hard enough or unfeeling enough to oppose what was thus laid before him, as an absolute necessity, but his acquiescence was ungraciously wrung from him at the moment, and during the

remainder of the day he vented on his daughters the full flood of his temper.

Even Rose was forced to bow before it, and since every word she said, on this evening, was made the occasion of a fresh burst of wrath, a dead silence had reigned for above an hour in the drawing-room. Anne was gone to bed. Katherine and Rose were working. Mr. Dacre was sitting with his hands on his knees, staring into the fire.

There was a sound of wheels at the door, and the door bell rang.

Rose looked at Katherine with a joyful look, and her lips made the noiseless sound of "Nigell!"

Katherine rose from her seat, but was called to order by Mr. Dacre. "Sit still,

I desire. What plague is coming to pester us to-night?"

There was a little delay, and then a servant entered the room, approached Katherine, and said, "Mr. Roper was in the dining-room, and wished to speak with her."

The countenances of both sisters fell, and a glow, proceeding from many varied feelings, overspread Katherine's cheek. She had her thoughts, hopes as well as fears, and fears as well as hopes, connected with Trevethlan's return to the neighbourhood. To have nothing but fear would not have been human, and she was very human; but in her soberer mind, when she could still a certain throbbing excitement as she pictured their meeting, her feeling was one of dread. She was resolved to be Anne's

guardian, so long as her help, and care, and guardianship were needed; and she was resolved to be a guardian unentangled and free. Her dread was connected with this resolve. She dreaded lest Trevethlan should press his wishes, and misunderstand her; she dreaded pressure from Mr. Hope in his care for her and *his* happiness; most of all she dreaded a disturbance in her own heart. Some can bear a struggle; she felt too much to make struggles otherwise than hateful to her. In this visit, at this unexpected hour, there swam before her eyes visions of some approaching disturbance, some request, some decision to be made, and her heart trembled.

She rose quickly, however, and put aside her work, pausing only when her father

said, "Desire Mr. Roper to walk in here." The servant replied, "Mr. Roper wishes to speak with Miss Dacre alone." She then flew away to save a further altercation.

Mr. Roper was standing by the decaying embers of what had been a fire, and a single candle shed its dreary light upon his figure; but even this dim vision sufficed to shew Katherine that something strange had happened, and when he took her hand and shook it in silence, his hand was trembling, and his pressure was so agitated that an icy terror stole through her veins. What could he be coming to announce to her in this singular manner?

"What is the matter, Mr. Roper?" she asked, as quietly as she could.

"I came to tell you of a very unfore-

seen—a very—a very tragical event that has happened, a very”

“Where?” Katherine burst in.

“At Brackleigh. I came straight from thence. I come to you, Miss Dacre, at Mr. Hope’s desire.” He paused.

If human beings could read each other’s heart, and know the agony they cause by inadvertent words. If Mr. Roper could have been aware of the speechless terror with which he filled Katherine’s heart, shewing her, once more, how her life’s hope hung on Trevethlan’s life, he would have been sorry all his days after.

“Sent to me! Tell me what has happened,” she said, in a low voice; low because she felt more inclined to scream it than to speak.

Mr. Roper obeyed; took her hand, agita-

tedly, and said : "Can you believe it? Mrs. Hope is dead!" His agitation was in and for himself, not for her. His kind heart was racked with the scene he had witnessed, and he could not speak of it in calmness.

Katherine stood speechless. One bound there was of something like joy in the relief the words afforded, but that momentary feeling passed, she stood shocked, grieved, and, had it been really possible to be so, incredulous.

The wife, on her wedding day, dead! The long sought restored only to be snatched away! The hope of making up, in this world, for a wrong madly done, and fervently repented, dashed aside! It *seemed* one of those dispensations of a merciful Providence, before which our dull and faithless eyes turn away in trembling.

"You are shocked, Miss Dacre. I knew you would be so. So kind a friend as Mr. Hope! So sad and unexpected an event! Pray sit down, and I will tell you, more at leisure, all that has occurred." He pushed a chair close to the fading fire; and, now that he *had* told his bad news, recovered himself, and was able to attend to Katherine, and to speak with composure.

"Yes; do tell me all," she said, after a moment. "I can hardly believe it is true. Tell me from the beginning. When was it? Did the marriage take place?" She would have asked other hurried questions, but Mr. Roper stopped her.

"I will tell you in detail, Miss Dacre. I am in no hurry. I sent on a messenger to my poor wife, who must be anxious, and who will be much distressed, and I told her I should call on you. It is, in

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fact, by Mr. Hope's desire that I come. I will tell you for what purpose in the course of my sad tale. I went to Brackleigh about three o'clock. Mrs. Trevethlan had not then arrived, and I fancied that Mr. Hope appeared anxious. He said nothing, however, of his anxiety, and I accompanied him into the pretty boudoir that had been prepared, and *there* I made my simple preparations for the ceremony. This done, Mr. Hope begged me to go into the library, and, with his usual thoughtful care, provided me with books suited to my taste. He said he hoped I should not be detained long. I assured him I was at his orders for the day. I little thought how much I should be required. Though, as I said, anxious for the moment, his countenance was open

and happy. He has, as you already know, related to me his history, and I could plainly trace how a peaceful conscience was doing its work in renovating his soul. I thought of all the happiness about to be born into that house ; but God has ordered it otherwise, and it becomes us to bow to His decrees."

Mr. Roper paused a moment, and then went on, hurriedly, with his narrative ; and, whether from that natural process by which feeling warms the language, or whether in his hurry he had not time to reflect, he dropped his usual measured words and hackneyed observations, and simply, and even graphically, related what followed.

"Shortly after his departure, the rush of footsteps in the house told me that she

was come. The library, as you are aware, does not look to the front, and I could not therefore, though I had curiosity, see anything that occurred. In about a quarter of an hour Mr. Hope came to me and told me that Mrs. Trevethlan was to rest for a short time before the marriage took place, and that her son was with her. He said she had not been well in the morning, which had been the cause of a slight delay; but that she was now better, and hoped, in half an hour, to be ready for the ceremony to proceed. The expression of anxiety had vanished from his countenance. He looked serious and calm, but happy; as if confident that, in his guardianship, this failing health would shortly be made whole.

“He left me again, for the time specified,

and then himself returned to summon me, and we proceeded to the boudoir. It was empty. I put on my surplice, opened my books, and stood ready for her coming. Mr. Hope also stood near me, his eyes fixed upon the door which opened from the dressing-room prepared for her. There was a little delay, but at length the door opened, and she came out, leaning on her son, and followed by her attendant, a grave-looking, elderly person, who is much attached to her, as I have since discovered. I cannot describe to you, Miss Dacre, my surprise at that moment. In Mr. Trevethlan's mother I had expected to see a person of middle age; I had not anticipated that I should see a beautiful bride; but such was the case. She was not dressed like

a bride. She had on, if I do not mistake, a cap, and her slight figure was wrapt in a lace shawl; but she looked most lovely. I felt a momentary fear as I looked at her, so ethereal and unearthly was her appearance; so heavenly the sweetness of her eyes and countenance; so transparently pale her complexion; but it was not a moment for observations, and as soon as her son had slowly led her to the table at which I stood, Mr. Hope joined her, and the service began.

"In a voice very sweet and firm she spoke her vows, and most touchingly did Mr. Hope promise to love and to cherish her till death should part them. I speak of these things, because I feel as if the sound of their two voices, after what has since occurred, will haunt me to my last

hour; but I will dwell on them no longer. The service concluded, and both knelt in prayer.

“When they rose up, there was a smile on both their countenances, and their eyes met. The thoughts they had were beyond my powers to imagine. The thoughts *she* had, at least, were so. They were of heaven, not of earth. She then turned from him, and put her arm within her son’s; and, after dismissing her maid, he led her, I presume at her desire, to a seat; and then he stood by her until Mr. Hope fetched her to sign her name in the register I had brought. Mr. Trevethlan’s countenance pained me during the whole service. It was not only sad, it was gloomy. I can partly enter into his feelings now;

but, at the moment, I felt that, even if grieved at the marriage, he was needlessly revealing his disapprobation.

“When the signature was written, Mr. Hope again led her to her seat, and the maid was summoned back to make her signature. Mr. Trevethlan had already done so, and stood by his mother, while Mr. Hope kindly directed the former where to put her name. It was at this moment that a sudden cry was heard. I looked hastily round, and Mrs. Hope had fallen. The cry was from her son, who was hanging over her with looks of terror and agony. Mr. Hope and the maid sprang to her side, and, after some words with her son, they raised her up, and carried her away through the door by which she had entered. I do not

think, at that instant, that Mr. Hope anticipated any great evil; but, as they carried her through the door, I caught sight of her face, and I felt death was there. I, very sadly, divested myself of my dress; and in a few moments Mr. Trevethlan entered, and begged me to be so good as to wait. Tyler, he said, was sent for; and he added—with such a look as I have sometimes seen before, when hope is fading—that I might be wanted. I sadly repeated what I had before said, that I was at Mr. Hope's orders, and, thinking I might probably be in the way where I then was, I told him I should be found, when my presence was needed, in the library.

“An hour or so passed while I waited, and heard nothing; after that, Tyler came

to me, and told me the case was hopeless. It was an attack from the heart, and she had not sufficient strength to rally from it. While he was speaking, Mr. Hope opened the door, and beckoned to me. Never, Miss Dacre,"—and Mr. Roper's eyes filled with tears—"never can I forget the sight of his face at that moment. It was like the ghost of itself; it was as if twenty years' work had passed over it in a second of time. Yet he was perfectly calm, and said, with only a slight tremble in his voice, 'My wife is dying. She wishes to speak to you. Will you follow me?' No word about himself, or that anguish I read in his countenance. But that was always Mr. Hope's way.

"He went before me, and stooped over her, as she lay in bed, to tell her I was

come. Her son leaned against her pillow. As I looked at the group, I felt it was impossible a being so beloved could die. Could not the prayers of so much love save her? But it was not a thought for me to have, and I banished it; knowing that all the Lord of all does, is well done.

“She dismissed them both, and I approached her; and never did so saint-like a mind open itself to me. I found her not only prepared for this hour, but expecting it; and not only expecting and resigned to it, but happy in its coming. ‘My joy costs them grief,’ were some of her words; ‘but it would not if they knew me and my weakness well. I am too weak for sorrow, and weaker still to bear joy, and my merciful Lord has had

pity on my weakness ; He calls me home, before I can add sorrow to those to whom I would give only joy. You must tell them this when I am gone.' She said this, and more, to the same purpose ; and I left her, feeling that, although to *them* the dispensation was severe, yet that it was, in itself, a visitation of mercy, and not of judgment. She spoke also of her reasons for coming, and how she had prayed to live, that she might die *his* wife, to whom she had caused so much suffering. ' And now,' she said, ' all is well,—I die in his home, and I shall be buried in his grave ; and he will have peace in the thought that all he could do he did. For the rest, God will comfort him.'

" When I left her, Mr. Tyler was again admitted ; and, as he informed me that

the time of her stay on earth was drawing to a close, I returned to the library, to see if I could be of any further use. I there found that, with his usual thoughtful kindness, Mr. Hope had ordered some refreshment to be prepared for me. It was towards nine o'clock when Tyler came to tell me that all was over. He said there had been one moment of great agony ; but, with that exception, that her end had been as peaceful as the fading away of an infant. He had remained within call, in the expectation of some such suffering, and had been summoned when it occurred. He seemed much overcome by the scene he had witnessed." Here Mr. Roper paused, and blew his nose.

"Did you see Mr. Hope?" Katherine asked.

"I was about to tell you, Miss Dacre. In a short time I wrote a note expressive of my sympathy, and asking if there was any way in which I could be of use to him. I then waited, and in half an hour, or something less, I was told that Mr. Hope wished to speak with me."

"And how did you find him?" Katherine again broke in.

"I found him composed, and like himself. He said little or nothing to me of his own grief, and but little of what had occurred. His thoughts appeared to be entirely engrossed with anxiety for Mr. Trevethlan. It was for that reason he had sent for me. Mr. Trevethlan had declined to admit *him*, and he wished me to make an attempt to see him, and to

endeavour to persuade him to take some nourishment."

"And you went?" Katherine asked, to hasten him in his communications.

"I did, of course. I knocked, and when he heard my voice he admitted me; but I grieve to say that I was totally unable to administer any consolation. He is exceedingly distressed, exceedingly distressed, and after a very few words he plainly told me he wished to be alone. Grief, Miss Dacre, must have its way; and when a strong young man is broken down by it, he prefers, I believe, to suffer alone. I was compelled to leave him, and I returned to Mr. Hope, who was awaiting my report. He sighed more than once, but made little remark; and after a few

moments, thanked me and wished me good-night. Before I left the room, however, he called to me, and requested me to come to you, to inform you of all that had happened, and to ask it of your kindness that you would accompany me to Brackleigh to-morrow morning. He wished much to see you, he said."

Mr. Roper paused again, and looked at her for her consent; but Katherine remained silent. She was thinking it all over, and meditating on what lay before her.

"I think, under the circumstances, Miss Dacre—if you consider my opinion of any weight—that you need have no scruples of delicacy in visiting him at this moment."

"No. I had no scruples," Katherine said, with a faint smile. "I was only

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Dear as thou wert, and justly dear,
I would not weep for thee ;
One thought should check the starting tear,
It is that thou art free.

DALE.

MR. ROPER called for Katherine punctually on the following morning, and they arrived at Brackleigh by half-past eleven. Nature does not sympathize with man, but man casts a shadow from his own mind over nature. Not all the brilliancy of a bright sunny frost, making trees, and grass, and

windows sparkle, could lighten Brackleigh of the awe and shade of death that hung over it; and Katherine's beating pulses were stilled into repose, as she entered the hushed and darkened house.

Mr. Roper left her in the library, saying he would return to take her to Mr. Hope; but it was Mr. Hope who, in three minutes, came to her. Katherine had hardly had time to acknowledge the existence of that awe and dread with which we almost recoil from seeing one who has passed through a great tribulation, before he stood beside her, and held out his hand.

"I would not keep you waiting," he said, in his own voice and manner. "I knew how you must dread coming here."

If he had been overcome with agitation, the terror of seeing a man's grief might

have turned her to stone ; but the simple, thoughtful kindness of his manner was so unexpected, that it upset her, and she burst into tears.

He wrung her hand with great agitation several times ; but it was evident that, though grateful for her sympathy, that sympathy was not his object, for shortly he drew a chair in to the fire, made her sit down, and sitting down likewise, began to speak ; not, as Mr. Roper had said, of his own grief, or the loss he had had, but of him who was now his step-son.

“I want to consult you, Miss Dacre, about poor George Trevethlan. It was for that purpose I begged you to come here. His state of mind grieves me much, and I find myself unable to deal with it.”

"It is early yet," Katherine said, tremulously. "Calmness and comfort do not come at once."

"I am very far from expecting or wishing they should. Do not mistake me. I know,"—and his lip quivered—"what he has lost, and I know what the loss is to him. No grief on his part can be too great; but what I regret for him is that he is, angry as well as sorry; into an angry soul no comfort can ever fall. He sees, in this event, not the hand of God, but the hand of man; and to blows of man's infliction it is hard to submit."

Katherine guessed what he meant, but did not dare to ask. She was silent, thinking it better to wait for explanation, than, on such a subject, to make inquiry.

"You do not understand me, Miss Dacre. What I mean is, that he looks on me as the cause. On me, who"

he stopped and struggled hard with some inward emotion; then said, "I cannot speak of this. But *you* know, Miss Dacre, that, if ever an event was brought about by the mysterious dispensations of Providence, our reunion was so brought. *You* know how little such a thought was in my mind, when your words revealed to me that long-hidden mystery. Nor for what followed am I to blame. I know not; I might have been wiser, perhaps, if I had stifled that longing desire, by a life of devotion to heal the wound I had made; if I had overcome the promptings of my heart; if I had been content to be a friend; I

say now, it might have been wiser, but it did not seem so then ; it seemed as if for *this* we met again, for *this* she forgave me, that I might give up my life to cheer and comfort her. Nor was it," he continued, after a moment, "my will that brought her here. I do not say I opposed her ; I do not say it did not make me happy ; but, until she spoke, it was far from my thought. In truth, I may say, I waited but to hear her speak. Her will was my will ; her words my law."

He stopped again, and Katherine, still in sympathizing silence, waited for more. It seemed unfitting for her to say she was certain he had acted for the best. And what phrases of common consolation were suited to his case ? He did not

appear to wish for words, but, after a moment's thought, went on.

"I have said all this in my defence, because I wish him to feel it; for his own sake, not for mine. He may fancy, I am sure he does, that he has cause for resentment, and he has sorrow enough, poor fellow, without brooding over thoughts of helpless anger. I feel for him, God knows how I feel for him; but he should also feel for me; if for nothing else, yet for this, because remorse and repentance will and must arise, lest, in my too eager desire to bless her, I have hurried her blessed life to its repose." He clasped his hands together, for a moment, with a look of agony, and a contraction of his brows. "I resist the thought," he added, with some passion. "God knows I meant well.

It was God's will, and I strive to be content."

"You should be so," Katherine at last said, gently. "From all Mr. Roper tells me she said, you can have no cause to blame yourself, nor yet to grieve for her."

"I know it," he replied, his brow clearing. "It is human infirmity that troubles me, not my faith that is shaken. I know it is the will of One wiser than we are, who has ordered her so soon to rest, and I am content. 'All is well' were her last words to me, and they shall be graven on my heart for ever."

"But it was not of this I meant to speak," he again began. "It is of George. Would you see him, Miss Dacre? Would you try to comfort him, by telling him

and making him feel the *truth?*" He looked at her as her colour deepened; but, without seeming to observe her, went on. "I know it is a strange thing to ask of you, and my necessity only compels me. He refuses to see *me*; Mr. Roper went to him, at my request; but Mr. Roper is a good man, a very good man; and I cannot enough be grateful for his sympathy and kindness; but . . . he failed last night, and he is, perhaps, scarcely fitted to say all I wish to have said. Mrs. Frankland cannot leave her house in this cold weather, and I know not to whom to turn."

"I will do anything I can," Katherine said; "only" She stopped, and vainly endeavoured to conceal her embarrassment.

"Only what? Do not fear *me*; a friend for life."

"I only mean," and she blushed deeply, "I don't see how I can force myself upon him."

Mr. Hope turned away, and wrote a few lines.

"Dear George,—At my request Miss Dacre came with Mr. Roper to see me this morning. I wish I could persuade you to see her before she leaves the house. I think you would find in her sympathy the comfort that I have done; but do as you like best, for I need not say the suggestion comes only from me.

"H. H."

"Will that do?" And he placed the note in her hands.

Ashamed of saying it would not do;

ashamed of being in any way reluctant at such a moment ; yet not the less dreading lest Trevethlan might think her forward in intruding upon him, she was obliged to acquiesce, and returned the note, with a consent.

Mr. Hope left the room, and presently returned with Mr. Roper.

"He would like to see you, Miss Daere. Mr. Roper will take you upstairs." And earnestly and gratefully pressing her hand, he disappeared.

With a fluttering heart, Katherine followed her guide, and had scarcely time or power to wonder where she was going, or to picture the meeting that would ensue, before she stood in a room, which she had not seen in its bright array ; the very boudoir in which the marriage had taken place. It

was empty. "I will leave you now," Mr. Roper said, in a low voice; "he is in there, and will come to you," pointing to the dressing-room door. And he immediately left her.

The sorrowful thoughts suggested by the place in which she stood, calmed, yet could not wholly overcome the natural beatings of Katherine's heart. But what the room could not do, the first sight of Trevethlan did. With a revulsion, even of shame, at herself for allowing selfish feelings to have force at such a time, she became suddenly cold and still.

He came in, looking worn and pale, prostrate and absorbed in grief, as if no other thought had power to divert him, even for a moment. Not the sight of her, not the touch of her hand as they met,

altered for a single instant the fixed oppression of gloom and sorrow that weighed his eyelids down, and clouded his brows.

And when they met, he said not a word. No thanks for her coming, no expression of pleasure at the sight of her face. He left her again, as if to escape from even the dull light that streamed through the half-closed shutters, and placed himself near the fireplace, leaning one arm on the slab of marble, and with the other shading his eyes.

Katherine felt chilled and troubled. It seemed as if she had, in truth, forced herself upon him. After a moment's thought, however, she took courage, went nearer to the fire, and said, gently, "Mr. Hope told me you would like to see me."

"I have not had time to wish," he

replied, with a heavy sigh. "I fancied it was Mr. Hope's wish."

Though not ungracious in tone, the words were ungracious, and so he seemed to feel, as soon as they were spoken ; for, though he did not see Katherine's heightened colour, he explained, "I mean to say, unless I had supposed it to be his wish, I should not have allowed myself to think of it to-day."

Even the explanation, though it had natural courtesy, had no warmth. But Katherine had now recovered herself. The flutterings of hope and fear, the agitations of a long-cherished affection, were conquered and put aside : and she applied herself to the purpose for which she came.

"It was Mr. Hope's wish," she gently

replied, "because you will not see *him*. Why will you not?"

"I cannot to-day," he said, with agitation.

"But it is for your sake that he wishes to see you. He thinks you are angry with *him*; that you look on *him* as the author of all this misery."

He struggled hard to speak calmly, crushing his hands together, and biting his lips; but tears sprang into his eyes, and his words were broken. "Miss Dacre, we cannot help our thoughts; they come thronging before me. A month ago, all was well, as well as it could be—well and happy; and now—my poor mother!—a sacrifice to him. He embittered her life, and now she dies for him."—

"But who brought them together again?"

Katherine asked.

"I cannot tell," he replied. "I never asked."

"I did not mean what earthly being," she said, colouring. "That was only a chance. I mean Who ordered it that, after so many years of repentance, so many of fruitless search, he should find her at last. When once she was found, he could hardly have acted otherwise than he has done. What could he offer to her again but his whole heart, his whole life, to redeem the past?"

"I know, I know. We must all say God's will be done. I hope I shall, in time. But it is hard to reconcile His will with a man's selfish will. Mr. Hope was full of himself, and all *he* could do for her;

he never heeded my words. *I* knew her weakness ; I had right to know it, who had guarded her so long." And scalding tears filled his eyes again, and hung heavily on his lashes.

It was one of those cases in which, on both sides, there is so much to be said. While with Mr. Hope, Katherine's heart had melted with pity for him ; now she felt as full of pity for the aggrieved son. She was utterly perplexed how to offer advice, or how to soothe the sharpness of his regrets.

While considering how best to speak, he said, suddenly, "Would you see her?"

And tremblingly Katherine consented ; thankful that there was some definite thing she could do, to show her sympathy with his grief.

He said no more, but walked straight into the dressing-room, beckoning to her to follow. But, before he passed on through the next open door, he stopped and said, and there was a bitter reproach in the voice, "You would not be a daughter to her?"

"Not would not, but could not," Katherine said, steadily, though softly; pitying, not condemning, the state of mind which seemed to find solace only in dwelling on his mother's wrongs.

He did not notice her words, but passed on to the bed of death; and softly removed the handkerchief that covered the fair, still, features. Very fair they were, and the expression of peace and joy was beyond the common repose of death.

Katherine stooped over her, and pressed her lips on the pale brow.

"Thank you for that," Trevethlan said, seizing her hand. "She ever loved you."

"And I should have loved her," Katherine said, with tearful eyes; "but I cannot grieve for her now. She is at rest; and you, who know the sufferings of her life, ought not to grudge it to her."

"It may be so, but it is hard to part." The words came from his very soul; and when, a moment afterwards, Katherine, as she left the room, glanced round, supposing him to be behind her, she saw him bending over the dead; and it was with a look of such adoring love, as made her heart vibrate with emotions of sympathy, and longing, and jealousy. Not that jealousy which would rob

another, far less the dead, of its possession; but which would fain ask a like portion of love for its own.

He followed her in a moment, and his mood was evidently so much softened that, in the few further words that passed between them, Katherine was able to win from him a consent to see Mr. Hope.

They parted with the same quietness with which they had met, although with more feeling on his side. He thanked her, and said he believed the consent she had won from him could have been won only by her. He then shook hands, opened the door for her, and so their interview ended.

Katherine found her watchful guardian, Mr. Roper, seated on the stairs, and de-

clining to go again to Mr. Hope; she accompanied him to the carriage, which was waiting for them. She thought it best to leave the grace of the consent to Trevethlan, as well as to leave to him the time and manner of the interview.

When seated in the carriage, Mr. Roper told her how much good she had done to Mr. Hope, and trusted she had been as successful with Mr. Trevethlan. "In fact," he said, "he was convinced she had. Some minds, some men's minds, were accessible only to female influence. He had observed this, and so convinced was he of the truth of the observation that, had she scrupled to consent to Mr. Hope's request, he had intended to carry Mrs. Roper to Brackleigh."

Katherine half-smiled, but agreed with

him. In truth, she thought it probable that, where two men were concerned, any kind, soft-natured person might have helped to mend the differences between them.

Pleased with her agreement, Mr. Roper entered more at large into the question of the beneficial influence of man on woman, and of woman on man ; treating it as a totally new idea, and warming almost into eloquence with the beauties of his subject, as they unfolded more and more upon his mind ; and to do Mr. Roper justice, it *was* his own original thought. It was no fault of his if it had already been discussed by a thousand other minds. He had never read their discussions, therefore his thoughts were his own.

It was not till night that Katherine was able to indulge in reflection over the

events of the day, and when the night came, there was so great a deadness and flatness in her mind and spirits that thought was no indulgence, and very wearily she went to rest. It was not that, under such circumstances, she had expected, far less had wished for demonstrations of feeling ; yet certain it is, that the absence of that which, the day before, she had so much dreaded, had, in the perversity of the human heart, mortified her affections and depressed her spirit.

How often in involuntary yet vivid fancy had she pictured this first meeting ! How often had the picture her vivid fancy drew made her heart beat and tremble ! How often had the thoughts of Trevethlan's unchanging faithfulness made her sigh while she smiled ! How often had pity for

his loneliness filled her soul with the strife of contending wishes! And now she could scorn herself for her vain fancies; for what sign of a heart occupied with *her* image had he shewn? She asked herself whether, under *any* circumstances, she could have shewn to him the coldness, or, at least, the calmness he had shewn to her; and she felt that it was she who had been absorbed in the thought of him, not he with her.

She owned it was best as it was. She confessed that the absence of pleadings, to which she could not respond, was good; but some best things are trying things, and while she owned the good, her spirit rose up against it.

One too certain result followed. In the perfect consciousness of, and confidence

in, Trevethlan's affection, her heart had lain for years in calm repose; a repose so calm that only on one or two occasions had it spoken sufficiently plainly to warn her where she was garnering up the hopes of her future days; but anxiety is a teacher of another kind. *It* lays bare the very depths of the soul, and beneath its influence, in the doubts regarding the love he bore her, Katherine's heart woke up from its repose, and sorely was she tried in her efforts to hush it again to rest.

During the week that followed, she heard but little of the inmates of Brackleigh. Mr. Roper went there almost daily to "administer consolation," as he termed it, to Mrs. Trevethlan's attendant. She had lived with her mistress for many years, and she mourned for her as a mother

mourns for a child who has needed all her care. On these occasions, he once or twice saw Mr. Hope on business, and once he found Trevethlan sitting in Mrs. Baker's room.

"And how are they?" Katherine asked when Mr. Roper gave her this information.

"Mr. Hope appears to be much excited," he replied, "and so long as excitement lasts, it is difficult to judge of the state of mind; so, at least, I observe. Mr. Trevethlan looked very sad, and much depressed. Mrs. Baker says he is lost in that lonely house, without occupation, and she has no doubt that it will be better for him to return to his work in London."

"And is he going to return?"

"She believes so, the day after the funeral. She mentioned to me, in con-

fidence, Miss Dacre, that Mr. Hope had made him a very handsome offer. He proposed to him to leave his profession, and to live with him, being treated in all respects as his son.

“And he declined?”

“He did. He said work was necessary to him, and he preferred to work. And Mrs. Baker, though she appeared, for some cause she did not explain, to regret the determination, said that she had no doubt that he had decided for the best.”

“Yes, I should think so,” Katherine replied. “Men who have had a profession are not happy in idleness.” But, though she could moralize upon it, her heart sank at the intelligence. Had *she* been to Trevethlan what she had once supposed, his decision might not have been so hasty.

The only definite communication she had from Brackleigh was in the following note; which, on the fourth or fifth day, she received from Mr. Hope.

“Dear Miss Dacre,

“I cannot delay to thank you for having been the means of restoring to me, a second time, what is very dear to me. I mean the affection of him who is now as my son, George Trevethlan.

“He has had much to pardon, but he has pardoned fully and freely, and no earthly thing can ever, I trust, make bitterness between us.

“I have made a confession to him, as I had already done to his mother, of every thought and feeling that I have cherished. I have cause, as well as you, to know that truth and openness are good, and mys-

teries are hateful. All is well between us, and, so far as I am concerned, will ever remain so.

“Yours most faithfully,

“H. HOPE.”

The day of the funeral passed, and, on the following day, Mr. Roper informed Katherine that Trevethlan was gone. Actually gone; and this was the end! Rose was present when this fact was communicated, and she saw the momentary flush and the paleness that succeeded; but she made, at that time, no observation.

A day and a night Katherine passed of very acute misery—of even dismay; but if human beings, who have ground for trust, did but trust each other a little more perfectly, how needless might many anxious hours appear! On the

On the very next morning she received a letter from Trevethlan. It had been posted at a town about twenty miles on the road to London, and this care had evidently been taken out of consideration for her wishes, and to save her from all comments and gossiping remarks.

The letter was a peculiar one. It was not written in the tone of a lover. There were no lover's phrases or pleadings. Earnestness: that was its characteristic, and a most resolute determination, once for all, to have an explicit answer. He said it was reluctantly that at such a time he turned his mind to such a subject, yet that he could not leave the country which she inhabited without assuring her of his unaltered attachment, and endeavouring to

win from her a promise of a return. He then went on.

"I must, however, ask of you to tell me the simple truth. Is there hope, or is there not? The vague, uncertain hope with which I have lived, and not unhappily, for seven years, will not suffice me now. My home is lonely; the object of my life is gone; and my spirits, which never have been high, are oppressed with melancholy. I must have a definite engagement, or, whatever it may cost me, a definite refusal. Do not misunderstand me. I ask not nor desire a present thing, but I must have your *promised* love, or none at all. Forgive me if I write gloomily or moodily. Forgive me if I seem to reproach you for my long uncertainty. I know your refusal was once definite enough, and yet I clung to hope

through it all. I thought, then, you loved or might love me, and that was enough. But I may have been mistaken. I ask for explicit words, whether they be to bid me hope or despair."

Katherine was not disposed to quarrel with this letter—abrupt though its tone might be. She had passed the age which cares for romantic words. She saw she was still loved, and she asked no more; and though, from the moody tone of the letter, and other circumstances, she could suppose he was not faultless, she was convinced that so perfect a son could not fail to make a loving husband, and was happy. She answered his letter, therefore, with all the frankness and explicitness he desired; owning her own wishes, and her own attachment, of which she was now fully conscious,

without disguise. But she also explicitly added : "So long as my sister Anne, remains at home, and needing my care, so long I am bound to her. No one who knows her can fail to see that she requires, for body and mind, a watchful and affectionate guardian ; and having undertaken her guardianship, nothing shall ever tempt me to give it up. With regard to my youngest sister, it is different ; she is well able to take care of herself ; and, though it will ever be painful to part, I know happiness requires some sacrifices, and I will place no barrier but one between my happiness and me. It is for you to decide whether such an indefinite promise is sufficient."

She received, by return of post, a letter in a very different tone to the last. The

hope she gave was pronounced to be sufficient to support him, not for seven, but treble the number of years; and the ardent and grateful strain in which he wrote, convinced her that if his temper had its faults, it had its charms also. The future, distant as *that* future might be, was now occasionally pictured by her fancy; and that picture of her future home made her heart beat, and her eyes brighten.

CHAPTER XXXV.

God grant thee thine own wish, and grant thee mine.

DONNE.

WHILE this correspondence, and these hopes and fears, agitated Katherine's inner life, her daily life was troubled by other anxieties. The daily and hourly expectation that Nigel must return, and that his return would restore health to Anne's failing frame, supported her and Rose under the sad sight of their sister's decay. They never lost the confidence that Mr. Roper's letter would bring him back, and, though day by day disappointment fretted their souls,

hopelessness never brought its dreary shadow over them. The cares mentioned were, however, connected with Anne; and were caused by the impracticable temper of Mr. Dacre.

Having at last wrung from him a consent to remove to the seaside, Mr. Tyler, without consultation with Katherine, gave him the information, by way of a *douceur*, that houses at Sidmouth were very cheap that winter. Unlike Mr. Roper, Mr. Tyler never observed, and was quite unconscious, that the name of Sidmouth was very rarely pronounced. He remembered that all—and Anne especially—had returned from Sidmouth in good health, needing no potions of his composition, for many months; and therefore, as a natural inference, he thought he could not be doing better than to propose a return.

Mr. Dacre eagerly accepted the proposal; and vain afterwards were Katherine's words; and vain her assurances that, Anne's illness having a mental rather than a bodily cause, the removal to Sidmouth was simply madness. "Do you imagine you are cleverer than Tyler?" was the single and sarcastic answer vouchsafed.

Unwilling to relate Anne's story to Mr. Tyler, whom nothing but the abstraction of his tongue could have cured of gossiping, she simply told him that the want of novelty was a great objection, and that Anne's distaste to the place made her reluctant even to mention it to her. He must therefore undo what he had done. But this Mr. Tyler found impossible. All he said was supposed to be at Katherine's dictation, and was treated with contempt. For nearly

a week, during which a sudden increase of cold, making a removal impossible, left the question undecided, this strife of wills vexed the house at Sandlands; plunging Mr. Dacre into gloom and irritability, and annoying Katherine with the thought that the last remedy that seemed in human power available for her sister was about to be thrown away. She had, however, made up her mind to acquiesce in her father's determination, when they were unexpectedly extricated from the difficulty.

The day before his wife's funeral, Mr. Hope was ill; and, fearful of being unable to accompany her to the grave, he sent for Mr. Tyler to cure him. Of him he made the inquiry, "When do the Dacres move?" and heard, in reply, the account of the difficulties that had occurred.

Mr. Hope considered for a moment, and then said, "I think I can settle it."

And he did so. He wrote that day to Torquay to engage a house; and, on the following evening, he wrote:—

"DEAR DACRE,

"I have a house at Torquay, for which I have no use. If it is likely to suit your daughter, I should really be thankful to you to occupy it for me."

Mr. Dacre was enraptured. Gloom and ill-temper vanished under the bright hope of the savings that would ensue; and, on the first day that the weather permitted it, he cheerily removed his family to the abode prepared for them.

Mr. Hope's kind act was one which could only be its own reward. The inference universally drawn was that the

house at Torquay had been taken for the benefit of his wife, and no suspicion ever arose that care for Anne's health and Katherine's perplexities was the cause. And this was as he wished it to be. He had once desired to be Katherine's natural protector; that desire had not only been baffled, but, in the agitation of superior passions, had been blown to the winds. Except in the memory that it had once been, no vestige of it remained. But the desire was only changed, its object was not relinquished. It was still his hope to watch over her as an invisible guardian, until the time should arrive when she might be to him as a daughter.

And Katherine had another guardian watching as anxiously for an opportunity to advance her happiness. After so many years of comparative neglect, no one

caring to enquire whether she had wishes and hopes or no, her happiness appeared suddenly to have become the thought and care of many hearts. This other guardian was Rose, who, with a self-restrained vigilance becoming older years, kept watch for the proper moment to speak; neither annoying with questionings that were only vain, nor disturbing with surmises that might prove false.

A few days after the arrival at Torquay, when, from a slight improvement in Anne's health, which raised hopes for the future, a cheerfulness long absent seemed to pervade the house, Rose determined in herself that a proper time for inquiry was come.

With a look and manner of playful authority, she stretched out her hand, as Katherine was preparing to read to

her, and said, "Not to-day, Katherine. I want to speak to you to-day."

Katherine smiled, and obediently closed the book. "Have you anything very important to say?" she asked.

"Yes, I have. I want to know, Katherine,—you must not think me inquisitive, for I don't ask from mere curiosity,—did Mr. Trevethlan leave Brackleigh without saying anything to you?"

If Katherine had been accused of murder, she could scarcely have looked more astonished than at this sudden bringing forth of her long and well-hidden secret into light. "My dear Rose, what makes you ask such a question?"

"My dear Katherine, because I want to know," she replied, smiling. "Do you think I never see or guess anything? Do you suppose I never see what passes in your mind? Do you fancy that I did not

discover that something, something unusual was the matter last week? Dear Katherine, I am not *curious*; do trust me."

"What is it you want to know?" Katherine said, gravely.

"I want to know whether Mr. Trevethlan left Brackleigh without proposing to you again; or something of the kind. I don't know how to put it rightly."

"No, he did not; that is to say, I had a letter from him the day after he went."

"Oh! dear Katherine, I am so glad," Rose said, affectionately. "I did not think he had; I thought you looked happier, but I could not be sure."

"And now, Rose, will you tell me why you ask?"

"Only because I want to know," she repeated. "And now, Katherine, I want to

know more ; I want to know what you said to him."

Katherine did not immediately answer. She reflected for some moments. At last she turned suddenly to Rose, and said : "Since you know so much, dear Rose, you shall know all. I do trust you most entirely, and you may be sure I have never hidden anything that ought to have been spoken from you or Annie. Some things it is right to conceal—right and painful too. There," she continued, opening her work-box, and taking from a letter-case the letter from Trevethlan, "you may read that, and then I will try to tell you what I said."

Rose's eyes sparkled, partly at the proof of Katherine's confidence, partly with mere youthful pleasure in the reading of such a letter. And Katherine, so great was her opinion of Rose's judgment, sat anxiously

waiting for the words of approval or disapproval that might fall from her lips.

"I suppose it is an odd kind of a love-letter, is it not?" Rose said at last, looking up with a smile. "But oh! my dear Katherine, I like it a thousand times better than any I ever read in books. I like it, and I like him; and now I see all that has happened, and I know why you would not marry him before. Poor man! Well, Katherine dear, and what did you say *now*? I don't ask you whether you like him or not. I know you do. But what did you *say*?"

With a feeling of thankful relief, Katherine now poured into the ears of her young sister the history of herself. Without any disguise, she told her what her decision had been, and, come what might, what her unalterable decision was.

When Katherine spoke of the difference

between her two sisters—pointing out the weakness of Anne, and the strength of Rose ; that Anne required her care ; that Rose was mentally, at least, better able to care for herself—Rose kept her eyes fixed on Trevethlan's letter. Do what she would, whenever the thought of being left alone in her home presented itself with any vividness, her heart swelled as if it would choke her. She kept her eyes fixed in thought till she had mastered herself, and then said, as calmly as if she had no concern in the future plans, "I was considering. Yes, Katherine, I think you are right. Much as I should wish to give other advice, I don't think you could leave Annie. Of course not now ; but I don't think you could leave her at any time alone with me, not till she is older and stronger. If I were strong and well, I could take good care of her ; but, as it seems that

is not to be, I must say I think you are right."

"And you, Rose," Katherine asked, with tearful eyes, "could you spare me?"

The choking sensation came more strongly than before, and a brighter colour glowed in Rose's pink cheeks. She could not at that moment discuss the question; but, playfully tossing back Trevethlan's letter, said, with effort, "We will not speak of that till the proper time comes. Oh! Katherine, when will the proper time come? Poor Mr. Trevethlan!—so lonely, and so unhappy. I do feel for him, I must say."

Katherine gave her the second letter, with a smile and a blush; and then said, gravely, "I have done for him all I can. I do not mean, I do not wish, to fret my mind with thoughts of him. I put it aside; and, dear Rose, it will grieve me

very much if, after what has passed, you are, or you allow yourself to think I am, impatient. After to-day we will speak of this no more."

"Oh! Katherine, that is impossible."

"Not impossible. I am determined to have it possible. I would rather not talk to anyone—not even to you—of what my father and Annie must not know."

"Ah! Yes, I see. I think Annie was frightened when she heard Mr. Trevethlan was coming back. She said to me one day, 'I think Katherine has forgotten Mr. Trevethlan; don't you?' And she looked at me very curiously; and, as I did not want to make her uneasy while she was ill, I only said, carelessly, 'I am sure I have.' And she was satisfied. She thought, I fancy, that if there was anything to know, I should have found it out."

After this the conversation turned into

its now usual track ; discussions as to whether or no Nigel would come. Katherine desponding ; Rose confident.

But this was the last cheerful conversation held on that subject. On the following day Anne caught cold, in spite of the precautions used to preserve her from the possibility of such an event ; and, with the cold, the faint improvement vanished, and the unfavourable symptoms returned. After a week of great anxiety, the violence of her cough was again subdued ; but no rally followed. The weakness of body and depression of mind seemed daily to increase, and daily to carry away the lingering sparks of hope from the minds of her sisters ; and still Nigel did not come.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

For mad words, deaf ears.

"How is the poor thing?" inquired Mr. Frankland of his wife, while she read a letter, during breakfast, one morning. He repeated the question, over and over again, in a tone more and more vexed, from the moment the seal was broken till the letter was done.

"I could not answer you at once," she replied. "A sad account, I fear. Such dreadful weakness, and such sad spirits.

Poor girl, I begin to be afraid she will never get over it now. She *must* think Nigel utterly forsakes her."

"That viper!" said Mr. Frankland. "What are you doing there, Janet?" very sharply, as Janet suddenly stooped, and, in stooping, shook the table.

"I dropped my knife," she replied. And there was a glow of colour on her cheek, from the exertion she had made in picking it up.

"Let us hear what Katherine says," Mr. Frankland continued, turning again to his wife.

"I will read you a part. After telling me of sleepless nights, and other bad symptoms, she says—'Papa is very kind, and allows us to have Dr. Henderson as often as is necessary. Our house is one of the very best in Torquay; warm and airy; and has beautiful, cheerful views

from every window. All this makes me try to be contented; for everything is done for Anne that can possibly be done, except one thing, and that, although I think and think it over, I feel we cannot do; not even to save her life. If Nigel does not love her enough to come of himself, it is impossible to try to reconcile them. Dr. Henderson is a very kind man, and takes a deep interest in Anne's case. He is so kind, and asked so much about the origin of her illness, that I have told him the whole history. I see plainly what he thinks. He did not *say* there was no other hope, but he enquired so earnestly whether nothing could be done, that I feel his opinion is that only some shock of joy can animate her fading life again."

"Poor soul! Poor soul!" said Mr. Frankland, piteously. "I have half a mind to write to that young viper myself, and tell

her head, without moving from her place, while the space from the gate to the door was crossed, while the bell was rung, and while she heard her name pronounced by a well-known peremptory voice. And still she sat with dark, wide-opened eyes, and flushed cheek, looking like a deer startled from its rest, when the door opened, and Nigel entered.

"Nigel!" she cried, almost with a shriek.

He was pale, and his bright-blue eyes seemed darting out of his head, with fear and passion.

"What is all this, Janet?" he cried, without another word of greeting.

"What is what?" was her reply, trembling, yet without moving from her seat.

"I have been to Sandlands," he said, coming close to the table, and speaking between closed teeth, as if hardly trusting himself to speak at all, "and they tell me

she is gone; that she is at Torquay; and they as good as tell me that she is dying—dying—dying, I tell you. What is all this, I say?" And he stretched out his hand, and clutched her arm.

"My dear Nigel," she said, speaking with effort, but speaking calmly, "why so violent? It is true she is very ill; we heard so this morning; but not dying; I hope not that."

"Are you *true*, Janet?" he exclaimed, looking in her face. "I began to doubt you. Are you sure it is not dying?"

Her colour went and came, and she trembled beneath his gaze; but she faltered out, "I hope not, indeed I hope not dying."

"Is it, or is it not?" he passionately said. "I shall go up to Mrs. Frankland." And he moved away.

"Nigel, stay," she cried, rising, and again almost shrieking his name. "Trust me, I will tell you all you wish to know."

He turned back, and said, more gently, "Have I frightened you? Forgive me. I really know not what I do. When I got back to Constantinople, I got this letter from Mr. Roper, and I set off at once. I have travelled almost without sleep, and I am nearly mad. But I did not expect this; I thought I was in time to save, to heal her; my poor Anne! to save her and bless her. What has happened? When was all this?"

"Mr. Tyler sent her to Torquay," Janet said, endeavouring to speak calmly, "and she caught cold there."

"Is this true?" he said, bending his piercing eyes upon her. "Is it a cold, or did I do it? Oh! Janet, speak true, or I will go elsewhere; I swear to you that I will know the whole truth. Have I done it? Did she pine for me? Could her death be laid at my door?"

"Both," Janet replied, evasively.

"Both what? I will have you speak." And he clenched his hands, and set his teeth in fury.

Janet trembled. "It was a cold; but I think she did pine for you," she slowly said, the words dropping like drops of lead from her tongue.

"Then you have deceived me, Janet. Mr. Roper says it was my doing; but I did not, could not, believe it; you, whom I trusted. Have you deceived me?" he asked, after a pause, as if, indeed, he could not believe it.

She made no answer. He went nearer, with sparkling eyes and menacing gesture, and repeated his question.

"Yes," she said, at last.

He drew back for a moment, as if even appalled at the confession; and when he spoke, it was not in anger, but in pathos.

"Oh, Janet! you! You whom I have so trusted!"

Her lips trembled; her whole figure shook; and her colour ebbed and flowed, from fiery red to ashy pale. At last the words burst forth: "Yes, I have deceived you; but for a purpose. Shall I tell you why?"

"Speak," he said, looking at her in wonder.

"Because I would be your wife! Nigel, hear me!" And she sprang forward, and threw herself at his feet.

"My dear Janet," he said, transfixed into surprise, and even terror. He stood absolutely aghast at her words.

"Hear me—hear me," she cried passionately. "I have loved you all my life long; since first *you* made me happy in your strange home. I have lived for *you*; thought of *you*; when I dared, prayed for

you. My whole wish has been to be worthy of you ; my whole study to be like you ; sleeping and waking, I have had no thought but to be yours."

"My dear Janet," he said, stretching out his hand to raise her up, his hand trembling like an aspen leaf. "Pray, pray get up ; this is very dreadful. What can I say ?"

"I want no words," she said, rising and crossing her arms. "I want your love. Now, Nigel, dear Nigel, hear me. Take care what you do. Do not throw away your own happiness. I am worthy of you ;" and she drew herself up, and stood before him, with flashing eyes, strangely beautiful. "I have made myself so. I have studied your thoughts and your nature till your being is in mine ; take my love, which I have not been ashamed to offer, and we will climb hand in hand, and with my

spirit to spur you on, nothing shall be too high for your ambition."

"Ambition!" he said, shuddering. "You make me hate it, Janet. I want love, not ambition."

"And is there not love?" And there was something mournful in the question, and her eyes lost their flashing, and softened into intense feeling. "Oh! Nigel; have you known me all these years, and do you not know what my love is? Have I not listened to you; shared your thoughts, felt with your feelings, all but one—and even to that did I not give sympathy, though you killed me? Can the fancy of a few months be like the love cherished and garnered in my heart for years? Can the love *she* gives, a love you have shared with others, be like *my* love, which is yours, and only yours; and for which every other love has been trampled under foot?"

He began walking quickly up and down ; stopping at the window to look out ; and then walking again. She thought he was considering ; that he was doubtful ; and the anxiety of her eyes, as she watched him, was fearful to see.

At last he came up, and took her hand with a trembling, agitated grasp, and said—
“It seems I have been very wrong all my life, Janet ; but, indeed, indeed, I never had such a thought. You made yourself like a sister—a kind sister—to me, and I never thought of anything more. My dear Janet, I am very sorry, but I love Anne with all my heart and soul. Even when I left her, I adored her ; and I ever shall, if it please God to spare her, and to bless me.”

“ Why did you not tell me so ? ” Janet said, fiercely. “ *You deceived me.* ”

“ And myself, Janet. I thought I hated her.”

"You love her. Then we have done. Now, Nigel, go."

But he stood, thoughtful and irresolute, as if perplexed how to act.

"Go," she repeated. "You scorn me, and I would have you go."

"Scorn! my dear Janet. Indeed I don't." He advanced, kindly and agitatedly, and again held out his hand. "I have loved you as much as my sisters, always, ever since I knew you; and I always will. Only as a sister, I cannot say more; but I shall try and forget this dreadful business, and I hope we shall be friends again." He stood holding out his hand, but she would not take it. She stood perfectly immoveable, as pale now as she had been flushed before.

"Well, I must go," he said. "I can't delay now. Good-bye. I don't like to leave you so, but I must." And he went to

the door, and opened it, and then again paused, and turned, and looked back.

He was shocked ; his nerves were all trembling with the scene he had witnessed ; shocked and revolted too ; and yet kindness of heart, and old love for, and confidence in, Janet, with a touch perhaps of vanity—for human nature is vain, and man is vain, and Nigel was vain—in the attachment he had inspired, softened him towards her, and softened the shock of the scene.

But while he stood looking at her, irresolute how to act, she burst into a laugh.

Still more shocked, almost terrified, he abruptly closed the door, sprang up the stairs, and, breathless and aghast, entered Mrs. Frankland's sitting-room.

She had been told of his arrival, and was scarcely surprised at his agitated looks ; yet, as she held his hand, she said, kindly,

touched by that extreme agitation, "What is the matter, my dear boy."

"Is Janet well?" he asked, in a tremulous voice. "I don't think she is well."

"Janet!" exclaimed Mrs. Frankland, astonished at the name, and wondering what was to come next. "No, I don't think she is very well; but not much amiss, I hope."

"I don't think she is well, Mrs. Frankland. We have had a very painful talk, and she is not like herself. You had better send for her when I am gone. When I am gone: wait a moment," he said, catching her arm, that was stretched out to ring her bell. "I want to speak to you. How is Anne? Will she live?" almost gasping out the words, as he gazed into her face.

"I trust so, my dear boy. God grant she may. But she is very ill. You know that."

"Yes," he replied, his lips and every fea-

ture trembling and quivering with the effort to command himself. "I know now, but I did not know it. Indeed, Mrs. Frankland, I never thought she cared. I don't want to say anything unkind of Janet, but she never told me ; she never did, and I trusted to her."

"Not told you? Janet!" Mrs. Frankland said, with a look of dismay.

"No, she did not ; nothing that made me think Anne cared. I thought she did *not* care. I was mad with her ! I think Janet meant it for my happiness ; she never liked my marriage ; she thought Anne unfit ; but it was cruel, cruel."

"It was, indeed," Mrs. Frankland said, very gravely ; "but, my dear boy, I must not have you lay it all on Janet. Others wrote. Your mother did, to my knowledge, more than once."

"I never got my mother's letters," Nigel

said, looking down, and his cheeks glowing with shame. "It was my fault, I know; I did not wish to be summoned home, and I gave a wrong direction. I have missed all her letters. I sent for them to Smyrna, and the man was robbed on the way, and they are lost for what I know. It was a chance, a chance I must thank God for all my life, that Mr. Roper's was not sent. I found it at Constantinople."

"Mr. Roper's?" Mrs. Frankland said, inquiringly.

"Yes, *he* wrote and told me the truth, and I came off. Oh! Mrs. Frankland, such a journey I have had, and such an end to it." And tears sprang into his trembling eyelids.

"I feel for you, my dear boy," she said, kindly; "but, Nigel . . . this is no time to preach, but I must say this; when you think of all your father and mother have

spent on you, of love, and care, and thought, and anxiety, I mean, much more than money, I think you have made a very poor return in your behaviour to them now."

"I am very sorry," he said, large tears falling fast, like a penitent child's. "I know it was wrong ; I knew it was. Will you write to my mother and tell her I am come, and tell her how I grieve to have been so ungrateful ? Will you, Mrs. Frankland ? I cannot stop now ; I must go to Anne ; I am sure, if I have sinned, I have suffered ; and I suppose I may still more. But you think she will live ?" And again he looked, with an agony of prayer, into her face.

"Yes, I do. She was a poor little weak thing, and you were too rough with her, Nigel. But love can do wonders with God's blessing. Hasten away."

"Thanks, thanks," he said, grasping her

hand. "And send for Janet. Indeed, I don't think she is well."

He hurried into his chaise and set off, but impetuosity does not always succeed. More haste, worse speed. He so worried the post-boy by his importunate exhortations that the man came at last to a dead stop. It was in the early days of railway travelling, and he arrived at the station, which was to help him on his way, just in time to see the last train for the night steam off.

It was two or three o'clock on the following day before he arrived at Torquay.

The door of Mr. Dacre's house was opened by a boy, a stranger to him. The old servants, through attachment to the young ladies, bore patiently with all Mr. Dacre's annoying ways; but the boys had too much dignity to submit to his biting sarcasms, and they came and went in rapid

succession. The new boy was a Torquay boy.

"How is Miss Anne Dacre?" Nigel asked, with breathless eagerness.

"Very bad, sir," replied the boy, with apparent delight.

"Where are they?" gasped Nigel.

"In there, sir; in the drawing-room." And sometimes guiding, and sometimes pursuing Nigel, and enquiring "What name?" in vain, they reached the door together, and he threw it open, and then stood transfixed to see the event.

Rose only, and Anne, were in the room at the moment. Rose on her sofa, and Anne stretched flat on hers, her head supported by pillows, the full light from a window falling on her wasted frame and hollow cheeks.

With one bound, with one cry, Nigel sprang forward, and fell on his knees by

her side. "Oh! Anne, did you indeed love me?"

"Nigel, Nigel, be careful, or you will kill her," screamed Rose; and, for the first time for three years, she jumped from her sofa, and walked alone.

More astonished at this sight than at all the rest, the boy now flew up stairs to summon Miss Dacre, and the next instant Katherine was in the room, and found Rose and Nigel supporting Anne's head, and Anne in a fainting fit.

One fearful glance she gave, scarcely hoping to see life in her sister's pale face; but the glance re-assured her, and first helping Rose, who was almost exhausted, back to her sofa, she knelt by Anne, and gently rubbed and bathed her hands and forehead. Nigel, bending over in breathless, agitated silence, watched her.

"You had better go," Katherine whis-

pered. "She is too weak to bear agitation."

"One moment," he said, imploringly, and a few more anxious minutes passed. At length, Anne opened her eyes, and gazed up where Nigel stood. She did not seem immediately to realize his presence; when she did, one cry burst from her lips—a faint and mournful one—"Oh! Nigel, forgive me. I was not false." It was the cry which, for months, had been bursting from her heart; it was the repelling of the suspicion which had poisoned the springs of life.

"Anne," he began, in piercing accents, casting himself again beside her pillow; but at the tone, and at the movement, every limb in her emaciated frame quivered, and Katherine again in terror arrested him.

"It will kill her," she murmured, "let me speak for you." And bending down and

kissing her forehead, she said, calmly and steadily, "Be still, dear Annie. Nigel is here, and does forgive you."

"Not forgive, but loves and worships you," cried the incorrigible Nigel. And, following Katherine's example, he too pressed his lips on her brow.

"Now I will go, if you say I must," he continued. And he rose up, and, at an acquiescing sign from Katherine, he turned away.

"But don't fear, Nigel," Rose said, kindly, as he passed. "Now you are come, all will be well."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

An April frost
Is sharp, but kills not ; sad October's storm
Strikes when the juices and the vital sap
Are ebbing from the leaf.

EDWIN THE FAIR.

“How is she?” inquired Mr. Frankland, very anxiously, of his wife.

The *she* was not Anne, but Janet. For a fortnight, ever since the day of Nigel's visit, she had been in a high fever. For some days her case was a dangerous one ; but a favourable turn had come, and, though slowly, she was struggling back to life. In

excuse for Janet's strange appeal to Nigel this may be said, she was scarcely in her right mind when it was made. The fever was already preying in her veins, and heating her blood ; a fever brought on by the violent and mingled emotions of love, and hope, and jealousy, and remorse.

"Better, certainly better, this afternoon," replied Mrs. Frankland, though the gravity of her countenance did not respond to the hopefulness of her words. "She has slept off the effects of her bad night, and we have had some quiet talk."

"Poor soul ! Poor soul !" sighed Mr. Frankland, as kindly as he had ever sighed for Anne. "I pity her from the bottom of my heart."

"You are very good, Ben, to pity her," said his wife, sadly and seriously. "She hardly deserves it."

"I don't think of deserts," he said,

peevishly. "I pity her because I do. Poor soul! I never cared about her before. Somehow I always felt—I could not help myself—as if there was a serpent in the house. But I like her better now than ever I did. And I will. And I say there's sense in it."

"She has no doubt been sorely tried," said Mrs. Frankland. "The tortures of jealousy she suffered must have been awful. I can picture what they were. In those fearful nights of delirium, when her heart was laid bare before me, I could see on what a rack she must have been stretched."

"Poor thing!" said Mr. Frankland, blowing his nose.

"But it is very terrible, Ben. To think that my own niece, almost my child, brought up in our house, should have been so guilty; it terrifies and confounds me. She has, this morning, confessed to me another deplorable

consequence of her mad attachment. Her father also has been deceived — cruelly deceived ; and I find it hard, in this case, to forgive her. He has thrice written to her this year, telling her of his failing health, and asking her to come to him. What she answered, I know not ; but she deceived him, left him to strangers, and to his own bad habits. And she knew how we looked, how her poor mother had looked, for his repentance ; she should have looked for it also. I can hardly forgive her.”

“ Poor child ! Another love pulled her back,” said Mr. Frankland, compassionately.

“ And even now,” continued Mrs. Frankland, without heeding him, “ her mind is scarcely alive to her guilt. She regrets her conduct to her father, and Nigel, and Anne ; I think I may say not only regrets, but repents of it ; but of her actual guilt, of her breach of the most sacred laws of God, she seems hardly conscious, or, if conscious,

seems indifferent to it. She troubles and terrifies me."

"She will come to in time," said her husband, consolingly. "Don't trouble about it, Bessie. She will come to. Your niece, and poor Rosa's child will never be altogether forsaken. We can't expect the poor thing to feel it all at once ; let her conscience get soft, and she will become a child of God in time. I am glad she don't talk about things without feeling them. Let us have truth, at all events."

Mrs. Frankland sighed, and said nothing.

"We shall be having her off to her father next, depend upon it," said Mr. Frankland, in a vexed tone.

"Oh ! yes ; no doubt of it. She has already spoken of her intention."

"You say it pretty coolly, Betsey ; and she has been as good as a daughter to you all these years."

“What else could the poor child do? I shall miss her ; with all her faults, I shall miss her, for I love her ; but what else could she do ? The more out of Nigel’s way the better, for many years to come. And, besides, in this path her duty lies ; and, as a dutiful daughter, she may yet, with God’s help, redeem the guilty past. We must look her out a kind guardian, and let her go. There is no help for it.”

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Hope.

It was not his first visit since the late events in his house. He was a man who shrank from observation, and he had learned what few learn, that to behave with perfect simplicity, neither shunning nor seeking the sight of men, is the only possible way to escape from it. He had shortly resumed his usual quiet habits, and most of his occupations, and had again cheated his neighbours

of their gossip. When once it had been said, "I saw Mr. Hope riding," and it had been replied, "So did I;"—when it had been remarked "How pale Mr. Hope looks," and it had been explained, "That, of course, is caused by his deep mourning;"—there was little else to furnish forth a conversation.

There was little else on the surface ; yet Mr. Hope was changed, and it needed not much observation to discover this. The explanation of his mourning, the natural change expected after a time of trial, might conceal, for a time, the greatness of the change ; but it was there, nevertheless. He was calm, and his countenance was serene, but he was exhausted. The fire of his eye, the vigour of his limbs, even the uprightness of his figure, had all suffered a change. As by a step, he had passed from the shore of youth, on which he was lingering, to the borders of age. He had thought and felt

too much in his life ; and, as in the common simile of the last drop in the full cup, the violent sensations of the last few weeks had exhausted him. His day of life was beginning to be toward evening.

There was something peculiar, something sad in his destiny ; sad, not only in the events of his life, but in the results. Born with so ardent a mind ; gifted with so active a charity—with such large powers of sympathy—and with means to carry out his feelings and wishes into acts and deeds, it might have seemed that he was called to take a forward place on earth ; to exert a large influence ; to do great things for the glory of God and the good of man ; and, if the possession of such gifts is in itself a call, he not only seemed, but *was* called to it. But the end was failure.

He lived in the shadow. He took down his candle from the candlestick, and put it

designedly under a bushel. Undoubtedly, from that secret place, its light did shine forth. Day by day was hallowed by acts of charity, and goodness, and sympathy, and self-conquest ; and as in the sight of God there is nothing great or small but according to the motive which prompts the act, his life of charity had its reward. Yet still, if, as has been said, the possession of such gifts as his is a call to use them on a larger sphere, his life was a failure ; and now that day of life was closing in, and the time for shedding a great light was passed.

We see many such failures in the world. They are among the disappointments of earth. Yet they have their moral.

The state of Janet's health, and inquiries concerning her, was the cause of Mr. Hope's visit, and occupied the first part of it. When all had been said on that subject that could be said, Mr. Hope enquired :—" Have you heard from Torquay to-day ? "

"Not to-day," replied Mrs. Frankland. "I heard on Wednesday, and all was then going on so well that Katherine said she should send no bulletin for a few days. Nigel has proved a good physician. The poor girl seems to be gradually reviving."

"I hope something more than reviving," said Mr. Hope. "I heard from George this morning, and he says the weather is so fine, that she had been taken out that day."

"Is Mr. Trevethlan at Torquay?" asked Mrs. Frankland.

"Yes, so I find. He is there, he tells me, on his own business." He looked at both husband and wife, to see if he had excited any curiosity; but they were, at this time, absorbed in Janet—her illness, guilt, and sufferings. And as no question was asked, he went on indifferently. "He says that Nigel Grey is a very ardent lover."

"He need be," broke in Mr. Frankland.

"He wishes the marriage to take place at

Torquay, but George says Miss Dacre is inflexible on this point. She will not hear of it till Anne is well enough to return home, and Dr. Henderson does not expect that will be till April."

"Then Mr. Nigel must learn to wait," said Mr. Frankland, bitterly ; "and I am not sorry for it."

"You must forgive that poor boy," Mr. Hope said, kindly.

"I am not so sure of that," grunted Mr. Frankland.

A moment afterwards, Mr. Hope asked Mr. Frankland to walk home with him ; and, as soon as they were on their way to Brackleigh together, Mr. Frankland burst forth, "And I will tell you why I can't forgive him. He is a selfish young jackanapes, and plays with young women's hearts as if they were footballs." And, in a moment, into the sympathizing ears of one

ever ready to listen, he poured out the tale of Janet's sufferings and his own compassion.

Mr. Hope listened with intense interest. Possibly, from the brooding on his own life, in which he had been wrapt for years, the history of the human heart was a passion with him. His judgment, when the tale was told, was much like Mr. Frankland's own. "Dreadful as your story is," he replied, "I almost feel as you do. I have often, like you, had a painful feeling of mistrust in Miss Grey's presence. I had no reason to give for it, and I, therefore, struggled with, and endeavoured to be uninfluenced by it. But it was there ; and no effort could entirely overcome it. It is plain now why we felt as we did ; and it is a relief to know that a real passion misled her."

"A very real one," Mr. Frankland said, sighing.

"Yes, but there lies the hope for her. Since she can love and suffer so much, there are elements in her character that may turn to good ; to good as violently as to evil."

"I think Mr. Nigel must have been in fault."

"I think not," Mr. Hope said, decidedly. "Since you discovered nothing, why should he ? You must forgive him. From a letter I have received from him, I am convinced he has suffered enough to win your forgiveness."

"Well, well ; Time will shew," Mr. Frankland said, ungraciously. "You must be discreet about poor Janet, Hope. My Mrs. will not be pleased with me for telling this tale."

"I will, indeed," he said, kindly.

They entered the library, the tables of which were covered with plans and papers. While Mr. Hope walked to the further end

of the room, Mr. Frankland turned his curious eyes on two designs which lay open, one for a school-house at some strange-named place in India, and one for an almshouse at Brackleigh. But when he saw on both an inscription, "To the memory of Isabel Hope," he slunk away, and twisted a newspaper with his fingers, making a crackling sound, to shew that it was a newspaper that occupied him.

Mr. Hope called him, after a few seconds. "I want you to witness the signature of my will, Mr. Frankland," he said. "That was my reason for asking you to come with me to-day."

"Why a will in such haste?" asked Mr. Frankland, quickly.

"I made a will a few weeks ago," he explained. "From circumstances, as you know, I was obliged to be in haste; and, as there was no time to have the proper

settlements, I made a will. That will is now useless. Another has been drawn up for me, and I wish to have you as a witness to it."

"Why this haste?" repeated Mr. Frankland, looking into his face; repeating the words because, for the first time, that look of exhaustion excited a suspicion that some meaning was hidden under the request.

"No wise man delays to make his will," Mr. Hope replied.

"Is that all?"

"If you ask me if any special reason has made me afraid of delay, I will answer you, that I do not expect my life will be a long one, that I fancy it will be short; but . . ."

"Pah!" said Mr. Frankland.

"But I may be mistaken," Mr. Hope continued. "Two months ago I thought otherwise. I thought I had a long life before me."

"And if you are right now, you were mistaken then. Life can't be long and short. Pah! I hate fancies."

"So do I. I only wish to be ready whatever comes. Will you glance over my will? I wish you to do so."

"What's the need?" Mr. Frankland said, ungraciously, unwilling to bestow any approbation on fancies; but, nevertheless, he cast his eye carelessly downwards. He saw, without surprise, that Trevethlan was his heir, and took little heed of anything else till he came to Katherine Dacre's name. His curiosity was then arrested, and he read, attentively, the few words which spoke of a special bequest to, and settlement upon her, from the day on which she became Trevethlan's wife, should that event take place; with some requests or instructions concerning the destination of a part of the legacy.

"Heydey! Is that in the air?" Mr. Frankland asked, in surprise, yet for once without anger at being surprised.

"I trust so. It has been for some time my hope, and, from what I hear to-day, I think the hope will be accomplished."

"For how long have you hoped it?" Mr. Frankland asked, abruptly.

"I can imagine why you ask that question," Mr. Hope replied, calmly. "I have hoped it from the day on which my vain wishes led to" He paused a moment, then added, quietly, "to the joy and sorrow of the last few weeks. Do you approve?"

"Approve? Why, yes! Approve! Why, now I think of it, I was a blind beetle and a deaf adder not to think of it before!"

"So I think, from all that George has told me. How came you to be so blind?"

"Can't tell. I never thought of it.

Never. No more did Mrs., I am very sure. But I'm not surprised. It's all now as plain as a book, and if he deserves that girl, I am glad he should have her, for your sake. May I tell the good news at home?"

"In confidence you may. But I know little as yet, beyond the fact that George is at Torquay. He would not wish it to be spoken of now."

"No, no, poor fellow! I understand. But it's a curious world. I'm not a bit surprised, and yet it is curious. I have thought, for years, that the very thing for her was to be settled at Brackleigh, but I never thought of this. How should I?"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The wind, that beats the mountain, blows
More softly round the open wold,
And gently comes the world to those
That are cast in gentle mould.

TENNYSON.

FROM a state almost of death, to a state that, however fragile and precarious, might be called life, Anne passed in the week following Nigel's arrival. Her heart, in secret and in silence, had been broken by Nigel's desertion, but as Crabbe says :—

"Nor dare I take upon me to maintain
That hearts once broken never heal again."

Hers healed, at any rate, beneath the soothing influence of his pardon, and his presence,

and his love, and very happily they began their united lives again.

It was more than probable that the troubles of Anne's early life saved her from a miserable existence. Self-esteem, self-will, and a domineering temper are apt, when the softness of youth is past, to turn into more or less of tyranny ; and, as Mr. Hope once said, there is no suffering greater than that which a fearful and sensitive woman endures with an inconsiderate and selfish man. In this view, not troubles only, but errors also,—as is indeed often the case,—were, by the overruling of Providence, likely to turn into agents of good, standing like beacons to shed their warning light upon the future.

Some such observations Katherine made in private to both Nigel and Anne ; wishing to stir them up to greater thankfulness, and to more serious consideration of their several faults. With Anne her words never fell to the ground ; she owned, with tears, that

nothing but the knowledge of what she *had* done could have taught her that she could be guilty of deceit, and assured her that many and many of her sleepless nights and languid days were passed in penitence for the past, and prayer for guidance and strength for the future. With such a temper of mind there was good hope that there would be no recurrence of ill.

Nigel, on the contrary, repelled the idea that either he or Anne had needed such a warning. For Anne's fault *he* was to blame, and for *his* severity he had also excuses to offer. Circumstances had been the cause of all, and very confidently he assured her, that there was not the least danger of his falling into such a fault in the future that lay before them. Though he repelled, however, her suggestions, they probably impressed his mind ; for some days afterwards, as he sat by Anne's couch, he said, seriously,

"Anne, you must never be afraid of me again."

"I hope never," she said, very fervently.

"Don't say 'hope.' Hope is a doubtful word. I say you must never be afraid, and I wish you to promise that you will not."

"I am sure I will try with all my heart," she said, in the same earnest tone.

"Try!" he repeated. "Try is as bad as hope. I want you to *promise* that you will never be afraid."

"I dare not," she said, in some agitation.

Perhaps indecision and timidity, perhaps even humility, is trying to the strong and confident. Perhaps Anne's doubtfulness seemed to him to cast some doubt on *his* kindness. However this might be, Nigel was nettled, and said, with impatience, "This is too bad. Anne, I do wish you could learn to have a little more strength of character."

There was not very much to blame in the words ; and yet, addressed to the pale, fragile form lying languidly before him, they were not fitting ; and far less was the manner a befitting manner. Anne's sensitive nature could no more help shrinking than the sensitive plant from the heedless touch. She shrank, and her transparent skin plainly shewed the rush of blood to her cheek. She turned her head away ; but Nigel's eyes were too quick, and his conscience was at this time too keen, for the movement to be unperceived or misunderstood.

In a moment he was kneeling by the side of her couch, and imploring pardon. " Anne, my dearest, did I speak harshly ? I know I did ; and what a brute I am." Anne turned back her eyes to his, and smiled ; and the smile was confiding and forgiving. But his conscience was pricking still, and he

went on : "You must not mind my quick words. You know I am not perfect. Anne, do say you will not misunderstand me, and promise never more to be afraid."

The confession that he was not perfect was so unlike his usual style, that, perhaps more than his other words, they affected Anne ; for, after a moment's conscientious consideration, she said, "I dare not promise, but I don't *think*, Nigel, I ever shall be afraid again."

But another union was now shortly to be brought about.

As soon as Rose perceived that all looked well and hopeful, and that anxiety for Anne might give place to other thoughts, she determined to make an effort to bring Katherine's engagement also to a happy conclusion. For this purpose, without Katherine's knowledge, she determined to have a conversation on the subject with her father ;

and, taking advantage of a short time in the evening, during which Katherine left the room, and assisted Anne to bed, she thus one day entered upon it.

“Are you busy to-night, papa?”

Mr. Dacre was sitting, with his hands on his knees, staring into the fire. Moody, yet less so than was usual to him. The delight which Mr. Hope's offer had caused was not yet faded; and, though grudging luxuries, he was not insensible to the pleasure of being in one of the best, and airiest, and warmest houses in Torquay. There were in this house, also, other small advantages, such as the use of a maid without paying for her, and the use of linen, to the saving of his own, which, added to the original great saving caused by the loan itself, furnished his mind with a stock of sweet thoughts on which to feed sweetly and continually. So great, indeed, was the good

humour produced by these unexpected delights, that he had on one occasion invited Nigel to dinner ; and twice closed his eyes to the fact that he came into the house before luncheon, and partook of a slight refreshment at that forbidden time.

“ Whether I am busy or not, I can listen. What have you got to say next ? ” was the not inviting, yet, comparatively speaking, not repelling answer.

“ I have got a good deal to say, papa ; but I can't say it unless you come here and sit down by me, and look good-tempered. You quite frighten me sometimes, papa. You look so ferocious.” Rose was not quite free from fear while she spoke ; but she was learning how best to deal with her father's singular temper ; and had already learned that half the misery of it was caused by anticipation and dread of its outbreaks. He could do little but thwart

wishes and speak sharply ; and to these things, with a mind more firmly moulded than either of her sisters, she could submit.

He was in a good, that is to say in a tolerable temper this night, and he left his seat with something like a smile, and said, "What mighty matter have you got to unfold, Rose?"

"First, papa, I want to know whether you think Katherine will ever marry."

"Not she," he said, scoffingly.

"Why not, papa?"

"Because there's no fool to marry her, as far as I can see."

"That is not a proper way of speaking of a person like Katherine," Rose said, with gravity. "I have no doubt that there are many, not fools, but wise men, who would be thankful to marry her if they could."

"Let them come and take her, then, with all my heart."

"Is that true, papa? Would you let her

go if a person did come and try to take her."

"Hang me if I care what she does!"

"Then you are very ungrateful, papa, and you don't deserve to have such a daughter. Katherine is now nine-and-twenty, and as long as I can remember she has slaved night and day for you and your children, and has never had a thought for herself." Rose spoke with such serious dignity, that Mr. Dacre was shamed into putting off his scoffing mood.

"Well, Rose, what have you got to say?" he enquired, in a more propitious tone.

"Will you be good-tempered, papa?" she said, playfully. "I cannot talk to you if you snub every word I say."

"Well speak on then, and make haste."

"Well, papa, there is a person who does want to marry Katherine. I found it out. She did not tell me, and she does not know I am telling you. But I am not like you,

papa; I am grateful to her for all the care she has taken for me, and I want to do something in return for her if I can. Well, papa?"

Mr. Dacre was thoughtful. "Who's the fool?" he asked.

"No fool; and if you speak like that, papa, I shall tell you nothing."

"Is he a pauper? Tell me that."

"I never asked a word about his money," Rose replied, gravely. "Never mind him, he will do very well. All I want to know, is, can you spare Katherine, supposing her to wish to marry this man?"

"I can't give her one farthing."

"Can you spare *her*, papa? I don't ask about money."

"Tell me who the fool is, and I will see."

Rose sighed as she saw that the bugbear of a fortune was distorting all other objects to his eyes. It was better to lay this ghost

before she proceeded. "The wise man, papa, is Mr. Trevethlan, Mr. Hope's stepson. I don't suppose he will be in any great want of a fortune."

"You amaze me, Rose," and Mr. Dacre's face shone with joy. "No, indeed. No fortune wanted there. From something Roper let out, I imagine Hope will make him his heir."

"I dare say he will."

"Hope must have twenty thousand a year, or fifteen at the least. He can't want that all for himself."

"Papa, do you care only about money?" Rose asked, pathetically.

It was a very home question, and Mr. Dacre appeared startled by it for a moment. He shook off the impression, however, and said, "Well, Rose, this is great news, indeed; and you want to know if I can spare Katherine."

"Yes, papa."

"Well, I suppose I can, if I must."

"You must think it well over, papa. You know Annie will be gone; and if Katherine goes too, the house will be very empty, and dreary, and dull. You will be left alone with me." Rose's voice was now tremulous; but she struggled on, and laying her small soft hand on her father's arm, looked smilingly in his face, and said, "Can you be content, papa, to be left only to me, your poor helpless child?"

Mr. Dacre was affected. He looked at her and said, softly and kindly, "My poor child!" and, after a moment's gaze, stooped forward, with a very unwonted impulse, and kissed her cheek. "My poor child!" he repeated, and then added, and with feeling—"I am afraid it is you who will have to murmur at being left alone with me."

"Not if you love me, papa. If you once tell me that, I shall be happy to be with you."

"My poor child, I am sure I do." And he sighed.

"Then that is all right," she cried, cheerfully ; and, with wonderful tact and observation in one so young, took heed not to press on the chords of feeling more than they could bear.

Yet she spoke truly when she said she could be happy. In that gleam of better feeling she saw a hope dawning for her in the future.

"And may I do what I please, papa?" she asked. "They don't want to marry yet, but may I settle things as I please ; and may I invite Mr. Trevethlan here for a day or two, not *here*, but to Torquay, to visit Katherine?"

"You may do as you please," he said, quietly. He then took his seat again by the fire, put his hands on his knees, and stared into the flames ; but his conversation with Rose had excited him, and, in his

inward mind, he went over his life—his first marriage, and his second marriage, and Katherine's childhood, and his two little motherless children ; and wherever he turned he met the earnest eyes of his elder daughter, and they seemed, in Rose's words, to say to him—"Then, you are very ungrateful, papa."

It was not usual with Mr. Dacre to notice Katherine, when, before leaving the drawing-room, she kissed him and wished him "Good-night." The kiss and the greeting might as well have been given to a marble statue ; but on this night he replied to her—"Good-night, my girl." She went to her room ruminating on, and her heart beating with the pleasure of the unexpected occurrence. She little imagined that in those few words he made a confession of his repentance and regret for the much unkindness and neglect she had experienced from him all her life long.

Rose wrote to Trevethlan the following day, and, with a little smile of mystery, gave the letter to her father, begging him to put it in the post ; and Mr. Dacre, whose mind was in many respects like a child's mind, and, instead of whistling, fretted for want of thought, nodded a not ungracious acquiescence in being made a partaker in the secret.

This was the letter :—

“DEAR MR. TREVETHLAN,

“I don't know that you remember me, but you ought, because I was your first friend ; and I don't know that you are aware that I have found you out, and discovered that you mean to take Katherine away from us. I found it out ; I will tell you how when I see you. Katherine did not tell me, and she does not know that I am writing to you. My reason for writing is this. I know that you would not wish to marry just yet, and if you did, Katherine would not agree to it. She must finish, first;

all she has to do. But it seems to me that that is no reason why you should not see each other, and if you like to run down to Torquay, and to call upon us, *papa will have no objection*. He knows I am writing, though Katherine does not, and, if you like to come, she is the only person you have to be afraid of. Of course you can do as you please. Perhaps you will think me very presumptuous and impertinent to take on myself to write all this ; but I don't know if you know that I am an invalid, and probably shall be so all my life. If you remember that, you will see that I give a great deal of trouble, and have very little power of giving pleasure ; and I feel pleased and thankful to think that after all the care Katherine has taken of me, I can do some little thing to make her happy. So you must excuse me, even if you think me impertinent. If you come down will you let *me* know, and I will

settle it all for you. I want it to be a surprise.

"YOURS AFFECTIONATELY,

"ROSE DACRE."

Trevethlan received Rose's letter one morning, and did not delay to act upon it. Being much occupied at the time, he could not spare more than one day, but he left London by that very night's train, and, by posting, reached Torquay in the course of the following morning.

He obediently apprised Rose of his arrival, and she appointed him to visit her while Katherine accompanied Anne in her first drive.

Touched by Rose's thoughtful kindness and earnest desire to promote Katherine's happiness, he submitted, with docile patience, to her directions ; and, after paying her a short visit, he left her, promising to remain in concealment, and return again after luncheon, the hour of which was approaching, and her father's feelings regarding

which, Rose was too wise to shock on the first visit.

After luncheon, while Anne was resting, Rose begged Katherine to bring her work and sit with her ; and, while they sat and worked, she turned the conversation adroitly on Katherine's future prospects, and dragged from her a confession that, when they returned to Sandlands, she should be very glad to have the opportunity of seeing more of Trevethlan.

"Why wait till Sandlands?" asked Rose, fancying she heard the sound of the bell.

"Why not see him here?"

"Oh! no, quite out of the question," Katherine said, eagerly. "I have said nothing to papa, and neither Mr. Trevethlan nor I wish anything to be done just yet."

"Perhaps you don't; but perhaps *he* does," Rose had time to say, with a smile, when the door opened, and he was announced.

The intense blush that crimsoned Katherine's face was mistaken, both by Rose and Trevethlan, for displeasure ; and, as he took her hand, he said, deprecatingly, "You must scold *her* if I am in the wrong. I should not have dared. You once told me that she always would have her way ; and was it for me to withstand her ? "

"You are not angry, Katherine ? " Rose said, softly.

"Dear Rose, how should I be angry with you ? " Katherine said, with emotion ; and, partly to hide her fluttered countenance, and partly by irresistible impulse of affection, she stooped and kissed her. And the kiss was given not without a swelling of the heart ; for, happy as she was, and happy as smiled before her her future home, yet, suddenly, she felt that the tie of her first sacred duties was undone. Freedom was come ; and, like the Prisoner of Chillon emerging

from his dungeon, she could not receive that freedom without a sigh.

The sigh was a natural, but it was a needless one. Her work was finished. She had done what she could, and she might be satisfied. She had done, according to her promise, *what she could*; not without failures, perplexities, prejudices, infirmities; yet, still, with a sincere heart; and, as blessed is the man who has found his work, so much more blessed are they who have *done* their work, so it be well done. The work that yet remained to be done in her home was appointed to another hand—a hand more fitted to do it,—and whose powers her absence would kindle into more active life. She had done what she could; and with hope, and trust, and thankfulness—thankfulness as well for the past as for the promise of the future—she might turn her steps into the new path opening before her.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"WHAT did you say, Caroline? Anne Dacre going to be married?" asked Frances Brandon, as she sat lounging in her sister's drawing-room, some time in the month of May. "Is it possible?"

"Why, Frances, I told you all about it last year. Did you not read my letters?"

"Did you? Perhaps you did; but I was then in the land of excitement, and did not care. Now I am in the land of flatness, and marriages are the staff of life to me. Going to be married—well, to be sure."

"Married. Married yesterday. Mr. Trevethlan, you remember him, Frances, was

down there, and came this morning, by Katherine's desire, to tell me all about it."

"It is a very mad world, then," said Frances, laughing. "That little tiresome girl married, and I, with all my charms, left an old maid on the verge of thirty."

"Not a little tiresome girl now," said Caroline. "Last year, when I was at Brackleigh, I used to see her and her lover; and I used to wonder when I looked at her how Henry could bear *me*. She had a sort of look as if she must steal any heart away."

"How did she find a heart to steal? I saw no hearts down in that country, except those we took there. Oh! dear, how it makes me yawn when I think of the country; and papa, being tired now of travelling, talks of taking a house again."

"I hope he will. It is time for you to settle down as a reasonable being."

"Oh! yes, I dare say. But tell me some

more news ; and by news I mean marriages. Who else is going to be married, or who has had a disappointment?—that will do as well.”

“ Katherine Dacre is going to be married,” said Caroline, smiling. “ I only had leave this morning to tell you.”

“ Katherine married!” said Frances, holding up her hands. “ Then the poor world is balked of an old maid ; for if ever it thought it had hold of one, it was when Katherine Dacre was born.”

“ Not married, but going to be. And who do you suppose is the lucky man ? ”

“ Mr. Frankland, who must have been a widower these five years,” said Frances, after a look of intense thought.”

“ Do you remember Mr. Trevethlan ? ”

“ Oh! yes, good worthy soul. So he is the man, is he? Well, I guessed that, only I had forgotten all about it. The day you

were married, Caroline, he disappeared, and so did Katherine; and, after a time, I met him coming upstairs, and I asked him to come and play at 'Post.' I remember now"—and she laughed heartily at the recollection—"the cold shudder that ran through him as he declined my offer. I knew then what the matter was."

"Only that she refused him then."

"Of course; but a refusal is the next door to acceptance in most cases, and I knew how it would be, only I have had no time these seven years to think' about it. Well, good worthy soul, and so he has been like Jacob? He looks like him. They will be a couple of good, dull, worthy married drones. I wish them happy."

"I wish you could have seen Mr. Trevethlan this morning, Frances, and I think you would be the least bit jealous. He is so improved, and he looked so handsome in

black. I quite wished poor Katherine was prettier, only she really is too good for one to care."

"Is black the new suit for a lover?" asked Frances.

"Oh! Frances, I don't believe you ever read my letters. I am sure I told you that sad tragedy about his mother and Mr. Hope. It is because of his mother that the marriage is delayed. He was so fond of her; he cannot bear even to be happy with Katherine yet."

"Mr. Hope! Oh, yes, I remember now. His marriage was a dreadful blow to me. I fell in love with his picture, years ago; and I have been, like a faithful Jacobess, waiting for him ever since. But he will soon be comforted, as the poor soul is actually dead; and I have a hope still that my constancy may be rewarded."

"I fear not. His health is, and has been

so bad, that Mr. Trevethlan said this morning he was afraid it would be his duty to leave his lawyer business in London, and to settle, with Katherine, at Brackleigh."

"What a hypocrite!" said Frances. "A very undelightful duty certainly."

"*You* may think that, Frances," Caroline said, warmly; "but I quite agree with Mr. Trevethlan. Duty only would make me live in another man's house, and do nothing, if I could have a house of my own, as he could. I am sure it is only because he thinks his mother would have wished it, that he is taking the subject into consideration."

"Pray tell him he need not trouble himself," said Frances. "I am quite ready to go to Mr. Hope, whenever he sends for me. If he could only hear of my constancy, he would certainly think it the most desirable thing in the world."

"Don't laugh about Mr. Hope," said Caroline. "Even last year, when I thought he was in love with Katherine, there was something about him that made me melancholy; and now they say"

"Was *he* in love with Katherine, too?"

"I fancied so then; but I suppose not."

"It seems to me that I have been all in the wrong," said Frances, laughing. "*I* thought Italy was the place for love, and marriage, and excitement; but now it appears that a country place, the duller the better, is the proper field for such things. The next thing will be, to hear of the romances of the desert of Sahara. And what has happened to Miss Grey?"

"Oh! don't you know? She is gone to Australia."

"Married, of course?"

"No; to her father."

"Has *she* had no *roman*?"

"Not that I have heard of."

"Well, men are mad, and the world is mad, and so I have always said. Witness Janet Grey and me. The most agreeable, fascinating, estimable of human beings, and yet left to live and grow in single blessedness. Where is my godson, little Francis? He is the only man in the world who seems to appreciate my merits. Do send for him down. I adore him." And when, a few minutes afterwards, a little boy of three flew to her with a bound of delight, she roused herself from her lounging attitude to lavish on him the real affection she felt.

"What is the matter, Caroline?" she said, looking up a moment afterwards, as she saw her sister turning away her head with tears.

"Oh! Frances," she said, with a broken voice, "if you could but have seen"

"I am sure, my dear Caroline, I wish I had; but you must not think of that now."

"I try not," she said, with the grave look which rarely left her face. "Katherine Dacre showed me I was wrong. She says I think so much of what I have lost, that I forget to be thankful for what I have."

"I dare say she is right," said Frances, kindly, "that is what most people do. You see, Caroline, there are very few people who have not some trial or sorrow. Now I, for instance, am heartily tired of my idle, wandering life, and often envy you your home, notwithstanding all your troubles. And then Katherine Dacre; if she cared for Mr. Trevethlan, all these long years that she has passed with that ill-tempered father, must have been tedious, to say the least; and then did you not tell me that that poor little Rose Dacre was a cripple, or something of the kind. A terrible trial that. For some reason or other, it seems as if nobody was, or very few people were without some drawback or other."

"For very good reasons with me," said Caroline, humbly. A moment afterwards, brushing off her tears, she said—"That poor Rose Dacre! Mr. Trevethlan was talking so much about her this morning. He says the parting between those sisters was the most touching thing he ever saw. He thought Anne would make herself quite ill, she was so affected, but Rose behaved wonderfully well, and he says she always does—always behaves in the most admirable way."

"Is it really—her illness I mean—a thing for life?" asked Frances.

"I am afraid so. Mr. Trevethlan said he sat with her alone for a little while yesterday, and she told him that about a year ago she had made some doctor confess he saw very little hope for her; and that since then she had been much happier, and had made up her mind to it all."

"Poor girl! Hers is a real terrible

trial; to look forward from fifteen or sixteen into a long life and see *nothing* in it. I am glad that is not my trial. I wonder how she bears it."

"By real goodness, and entire submission," said Caroline, earnestly.

"Poor girl. Well, I must say I think it rather hard of those strong healthy sisters to go and marry and leave her alone, or worse than alone, with that selfish father."

"I believe he is really fond of Rose, and that she improves him. Mr. Trevethlan said it was strange to see her make him do just what she wishes. But though I am the last person who ought to agree with you, I could not help saying something of the kind to Mr. Trevethlan."

"He did not agree, of course?"

"Yes, he did, and spoke very nicely and kindly. But he says he thinks, and he knows Katherine thinks, that though hard for the

time, it will be for her happiness in the end. He says Mr. Grey is very fond of her, and that for himself he is sure her happiness will quite be one of the objects of his life. He said," continued Caroline, smiling, "that it was Katherine's care for those little sisters that first won his heart; and that, as he had secured such a treasure, he could never do enough to shew his gratitude to those who directed him to it."

"Upon my word," said Frances, "a most lover-like speech. When shall you make such a one, my dear little nephew? And so," she continued, laughing, "this is the moral of the tale, is it? Take care of your sisters, and you shall have a good husband. But I have got no sisters to take care of. What am I to do?"

"How you laugh at everything, Frances! I don't know about the good husband; but I should be very sorry, indeed, to think that

such devotion as Katherine's to her sisters, and Mr. Trevethlan's to his mother, did not bring some blessing with it, and so I do expect, whatever trials they may have, that theirs will be a happy home."

"What I think the most curious fact, Caroline, and one that I have no doubt has a moral in it, is that that dull house that we, that is I, used to laugh at so much, should have furnished us with conversation for upwards of half-an-hour. And if you have any more to tell, I don't mind listening. I take a motherly interest in 'Katherine and her Sisters.'"





